WANDERERS IN THE MIST

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PART I

NIGHT had fallen, and Sofia Karlovna Semiovskaia had not come home. Her husband, Nikolai Petrovich Semiovski, was at first uneasy, and then he began to get seriously alarmed. There were wolves round the village—in the last few nights they had ventured close up to it: in the morning their tracks had been seen in the snow, and there were bloody patches in the undergrowth. That was where they had attacked each other, where they had fallen on one of themselves—and still his wife did not come home. It was early one winter's night. He looked out of the window: perhaps she was visiting some neighbour's wife, gossiping and drinking tea—in many houses there was still one window showing light, but the streets were dark and empty. Snow was no longer falling.

Nikolai lay down to sleep. She would be sure to come soon; the warmth and the pleasing smell of the burning pine logs, the crackling of the wood in the stove, the shadows which the fire threw across the floor . . . gradually he fell asleep. Slowly the light died away; the crackle of the wood in the fire came at longer intervals—and then it altogether ceased. Now everything was quiet.

That evening Sofia had climbed up to the manor house, which lay on a small rising away from the village. She walked with difficulty: now and then a bitter taste came into her mouth, as if she were going to vomit. She went cautiously, to avoid being seen, along the side of the road in the shadow of the trees, then up the front steps of the house. She knocked softly on the door, under which a

faint glimmer of light was showing.

No one answered. She slowly opened the door.

The landowner was sitting there, writing with clumsy movements in a large blue book; he started violently as she came in, and laid his broad, thick hands over the book.

"What do you want?"

". . . Ivan Kirillovich, it is so near now!"

"What is so near? Hey? Answer!"

"You know quite well. . . ."

The man rose—he was like a giant—and scratched his head.

"Does Nikolai know about it?"

The woman sank down into a chair; the squire noticed it, and gulped, but said nothing.

He was thinking—what am I to do?

He walked up and down, slowly and thoughtfully: each time that he came near the woman she moved convulsively. His hands, she noticed, were behind his back—every finger as thick as a sausage.

Suddenly he stopped, close in front of her.

"What business is it of mine?" he asked roughly—and was surprised at himself for doing it. "You must have been sleeping with your husband, too! Then why so certain it's mine? Hey?"

The woman sprang up, so suddenly that he shrank back. Her face was livid. She's going to make a speech—he thought—she's a German: I should have kept myself under control.

"You attacked me—like a beast, like a wolf!" she shouted at him. "And then afterwards you begged me not to tell anyone, not even my husband—you were sorry for it, and you would make yourself responsible for the

consequences! You started crying and saying you were only a weak man, and I took it all in and haven't said a word. . . ."

Now there's nothing more for it, he thought. Mother of God, forgive me! He shouted back at her:

". . . and you'll go on saying nothing, my little pigeon! First I've no reason to believe it's my child: I should have my work cut out if I had to be responsible for all the children in the village! And secondly, there was no one about at the time—not a witness—do you understand? In fact, no one will believe you, and I shall deny everything. And the magistrate and your husband and everyone will ask you why you said nothing about it for six months! Hey?"

But of course they will believe *her*, he thought, and in despair he talked himself more and more into a rage.

Sofia looked at him, and then, without a word, went out.

Ivan looked helplessly after her for a moment. Her light footsteps died away. He sat down again at the table. The bottle of vodka was there by him.

"I am ill," he said to himself, "I must go to the doctor at Odoievsk to-morrow. . . . I am certainly very ill!"

Sofia went home; when she opened the door the cold air rushed in, and her husband turned over, drunk with sleep.

"Where have you been?" he muttered sleepily into the darkness, and fell asleep again at once without waiting for her answer.

Sofia sat down on the bench; it was almost completely dark but for a faint glimmer of moonlight in the room.

How can he—why should he—be sleeping like that,

when *she* could do nothing to help herself? Man and wife are comrades, they say!

She could not understand these people, this country, these dull, strange characters, these Russians: for she was a German; her husband had got to know her in Stettin when he was wandering about and had taken her off—that was now eight years ago. There was one little girl, and now a second child was on the way.

She had had a kindly, red face, with dimples in her cheeks, and heavy lips. She had come back with Nikolai, she had learnt Russian, and now she was living in the village of Petrovskoie, Tula province, Odoievsk district. No visitors or letters ever came: there were only the peasants and their wives. It was a wretched life for the peasants, for the landowner was hard on them—all the land belonged to him and they had to rent it from him. The land was hard and poor, the taxes were high, and it was not worth while to grow wheat. Just a little corn for bread and kvass: and he did not even allow them to have that. He trampled down their fields; he broke into their gardens: when he was drunk he would lash round him with his long whip. The sweat would drop like soap-suds from his mare's jaws as he rode wildly, like a madman, through the cultivated fields. It was hard for the peasants: they were overworked and exhausted, and even their wives were subdued and spoke very little. Sofia had become one of them: her lips had grown thin, and the dimples in her cheeks—they were no longer there. Nikolai had once wondered what had become of the dimples—he had just noticed that they had gone—and he asked her.

"I don't know," she had answered listlessly; then at night it had struck her. . . .

Sitting there and thinking, she dozed into sleep until her husband woke again. It was quite dark.

"Sofia!" he called.

She climbed up to him on top of the stove.

Three months later the boy was born. He was named after his dead grandfather Feodor—Feodor Nikolaievich Semiovski. When he lay in his cradle—a basket hanging on two ropes from the roof—when he kicked out his little legs (and when her husband was working in the fields) the dimples came again to his mother's pallid cheeks.

A woman looked in. On her right hand there were four fingers missing: she had been born like that, with only the thumb. As a child she had been very pretty, but now she was an old maid of thirty—for who would take a wife who could not use her hands? She lived with a little orphan girl in a hut outside the village; she did not come much into the village—she was always shy of meeting people. They always looked at her right hand; they would keep out of her way and laugh at her. Her face was pale and delicate: other women of her age were coarse and care-worn. "She is just different," people said, and they kept away from her.

She looked shyly through the doorway.

"May I come closer, Sofia?"

Sofia said nothing, but signed to her to come in.

"And may I see Fedia, Sofia?"

Then Sofia showed her irritation, and stammered in a low voice:

"No, you mayn't, Nadiejda," she said. "He's asleep, and he wakes the moment anyone looks at him. . . ."

Nadiejda Sergeievna went out again.

In the evening she slunk up to the squire's house. He did not look up, for he knew her footsteps—he put his arm round her and went on writing. She waited patiently, looking at the book in which he was writing; she could not read.

At last he had finished. He got up—and now she hardly reached to his chest. He looked at her and thought how tender she was—and a feeling of warmth filled his heart. He looked closely at her as she lay quite still in his arm.

"Little pigeon!" he said suddenly, and pressed her close to him with the arm that was holding her; but even that was too much for her, for she said softly: "Ow!"

It was like squeezing a little bird. He let her go at once.

It's true—she was thinking—I wanted to come up here, too—well, what for? She did not know herself exactly why she had come. Perhaps to grumble about the peasants, or about herself? Or to have some cause for a few tears, or for a little warmth and love?

Up here in the squire's house she could be at ease. This was the only place where she counted for anything, where anyone loved her, where anyone treated her kindly and like a lady.

For when none of the peasants or labourers would marry her, and one day she had realised that she would remain unmarried, she had gone up to him; and he had done with her what she wanted. When in the morning they lay tired out, in each other's arms, the whole business would have been over as far as she was concerned, as it had been with all the other women, but suddenly the most distressing feeling that a man can have came over him: it was true that he had had this woman—had her

ardently and passionately—but she had lain quiet in his naked arms, for all his hot breath, his lust, his tenderness, his manliness—quiet, as if numbed, patient, suffering, yielding. He had tried to rouse her to passion—tried every means, he remembered—but it was useless: she lay there peacefully, and only smiled and grew paler.

He was a lonely man, not yet forty years old. He had grown up here as son of the lord of the manor. His parents and an ailing wife had died. There was no variety in his life, except for visits to the brothel in Odoievsk. Now and then, too, he had sent for a girl, or had met one in the forest: but afterwards he would have a feeling of revulsion at their passionless faces, their lukewarm bodies, their easy surrender. But this woman, who had come voluntarily to him after avoiding him for many years, had remained something unusual for him. She lay there, a little bird, a flower from the unknown. He looked at her: she was still sleeping.

Her thin lips were moist, and they seemed a little more rounded. Her eyelids, closed over her eyes, looked extremely delicate and transparent: he could not bring himself to touch them, even lightly.

She did not wake. Her head lay sunk in her hair. He looked at her and thought: she has not waked up; she is resting, and she trusts me. This girl, whom no one in the village would have, moved him deeply.

And now she was once more with him. He was holding her in his arm, and it suddenly struck him that he was never doing anything except waiting for her; but he did not tell her that.

She did not know what she ought to say. She had come

here—and the unfriendliness of the people in the village was always driving her to come here again.

My God, she had wanted to see the little baby—nothing more than that—but people would not show her little babies; they distrusted her, and preferred to have nothing to do with her.

". . . she is different from us. . . ."

Every time it was like that: a child would be coming, it would be born, the peasants would listen while the innkeeper told the news; and if people weren't too tired in the evening they would go and visit the new parents; the child would be handed round while the men drank tea. The women's hands were hard, the baby would cry—so many faces frightened it. It would cry loudly, where but for it everything was always uniformly quiet. And the women would smile a little, they would sigh in an embarrassed way, and say:

"Ah, well!"—and then they would soon take their leave. The men would sit on for a while longer, and then they, too, would go.

Only Nadiejda was never there.

"You don't understand how to hold a child," the others would say when she wanted to take the child, and they would snatch it away from her.

"No, you really don't understand how to, with those fingers of yours," the young mother would say, half apologetically.

Nadiejda would go. The women would look at her as she went and would say something.

Nadiejda wanted very much, frightfully much, to have a child. That was the reason why she had gone to the

squire, and why she went on going. Once she had hopes that it was coming: but it was not so, she had mistaken the signs. And when she went to him again the next time, and his desire for her began to flicker up, it suddenly seemed to her as if she had awakened from a deep dream. She pushed him away so roughly that he, the great brute, fell on to the floor, and she screamed at him despairingly, with tears which she could not hold back:

"But I want a child, a child!"

Since that night she had known that she did not love him, that she had never loved him; but in spite of it she came again—this woman and another woman gets a child, why should she be cursed? She came less often; now it must be at least three weeks since she was here last.

He was a poor hand at passing away the time. He had waited for a long while, he had got drunk, he had worked, he had reckoned up his accounts, he had cursed her and every woman in the world. But now she was there, and all his anger was forgotten.

"My little bird," he said, and held her tight in his arms. And she, in his arms, felt how tightly *she* held him—she could do with him whatever she liked: for example, through him she could get her revenge on the village. But then she realised quite clearly that though she did not love him there was nowhere else that she could go but here. Here there was someone for her.

This consciousness of her weakness made her decide not to tell him of Semiovskaia's reception of her; but during the night she blabbed it all out in her sleep. He was awake; he had formed the habit of only pretending to sleep when she was with him. As soon as he saw that she was asleep he would open his eyes, and he would lie

by her like that until morning, noting her even breathing.

In the early morning she went away quietly, while it was still quite dark and all the windows were still curtained. The dry twigs crackled under her feet. He fell into a heavy sleep; his hand dropped slowly from the bed—he was still thinking: she has made the whole bed warm, small as she is! Then he slept and snored, and woke towards midday, tired and in a bad humour.

"The squire's in a bad mood," the servants said. He was already shouting:

"Vassilii! Vodka! Quick about it, or there'll be trouble!"

A shoe came flying towards the servant, who crept out with his back bent.

Then the master, fully clad, sat there and drank vodka from a glass.

He was thinking peevishly:

She has gone. And what have I got out of it? Now I am sitting here and soaking till the liquor splashes about in my belly. To the devil and hell with it! Am I tied up with this scarecrow of a woman? What miserably lean arms she's got! . . .

He spat forcibly, tried to convince himself that she was ugly and stupid and ridiculous; and then suddenly realised—and almost hated himself for it—that he must always keep thinking of this hateful, ridiculous woman!

"So I'm already thinking of her again! She's my misfortune, I can see that! But why do I let her go away if I need her, the little devil? Why don't I just keep her here? Is she master here, or am I? Hey?"

"Vassilii!" he shouted, in a voice that made the cupboards rattle.

Vassilii came, with his rounded back; his hair was hanging over his face, and his eyes gleamed like lamps through the strands of hair.

"Vassilii!" the squire shouted (the bottle's soon empty, Vassilii noticed). "Vassilii, am I master here? Yes or no!"

"You are master, little father; you are the chief man in the whole district!"—and he was outside in a flash. By now the squire was absolutely drunk; he stumbled through the room and down the stairs, to where the stable-lad was waiting, trembling, with the mare. He glanced round, furtively and helplessly: there was no one to be seen in the courtyard, it was as still as death—there were only faces looking through the grilles. He was still only a boy; he was in terror of the master. But the squire did not see him at all: he mounted and was just going to ride off when something occurred to him, and he shouted:

"Vassilii!"

He could hardly speak; everything seemed white and red in front of his eyes; but he was angry—he no longer knew why.

He was in such a passion that he had forgotten everything: "I am master, the swines shall pay for it if anything goes wrong with me! . . . Oh, how badly everything's going!"

Vassilii came. In his left hand he held an amulet, a splinter of wood from some saint's coffin. Perhaps it would help—"some time or other I shall certainly be killed—and I am still so young . . ."

"Vassilii!" the master said in a thick voice, "isn't there in the village a woman with one hand?"

Then Vassilii realised.

"Master Ivan, do you mean Nadiejda? She has only

one finger on her right hand."

"That's right! That's right! One finger! Take my stockings to her! Tell her—she's to—mend—the—holes—with—her—one—finger!—The dirty stockings, mind you! Say that it's my order! And tell her I am master here! Do you understand? I am master! . . ."

"Yes, little father!"

Vassilii jumped aside. The squire dug the heels of his boots into the mare's soft body, so hard that the beast leapt madly through the gate. Then the others came out cautiously from their hiding-places.

"What was that he said? . . ."

He rode round the manor-house and then straight towards the village. He rode unheeding, over the peasants' fields; drunkenly, faster and faster, like a giant—like a devil on his mare—whirling his whip round him—through the gardens and the fences—wildly and more wildly—among the children and the beasts, between the houses and the men who had done their day's work—they stood still and looked furtively at him, pulled off their caps and murmured:

"God bless you, little father!"

There was a woman with a baby at her breast; he was riding straight at her. She was sitting at the edge of a field, on a stone; behind her there was the young green corn and the sun. There he was coming, on his horse, capless, his eyes black under their shaggy brows—a stream of saliva running from his mouth—his thick hands resting on his steed's head—half leaning forward, fat, like a great giant astride his maddened beast—that was how she

saw him coming towards her.

The woman had a sudden vision: it seemed to her that the sky in front of her was blackened out by the giant body of a naked man, with black thaler-pieces in place of eyes—coming lower over her, ever lower—the sky sank down, came nearer, nearer; but—then to her surprise she no longer felt any fear—it was so intoxicating . . . Soon, she knew, it would be there—over her—in her—it would shatter her in pieces, send her to everlasting rest—rapture such as she had never felt before ran through all her limbs—it took away her breath—she bent back gasping, opened her mouth wide, rose to meet him . . .

Then the milk spurted from her breast; the baby, which had been one with her body, pushed itself away, cried bitterly—and then, then she came to her senses, and saw, three paces from her, the maddened horse like a giant wall. With an instinctive movement she slipped from the stone to the ground. There, where she had just been sitting, over the stone which was still warm from her body, was the outstretched frame—the mare's sweat dropped like foam . . .

In a flash it had passed like a phantom.

Late that evening he came slowly back from somewhere or other, the horse trembling and reeking. The squire went slowly into the house.

"Vassilii," he said, "I gave you an order—did you carry it out?"

"Little father, forgive me, be so kind, be merciful—I wasn't able to go out, I . . ."

His master interrupted:

"Good, here's something for you," and he threw a small

coin to the man; Vassilii snatched it up quickly enough, in spite of his downcast eyes.

"Don't talk to anyone about it, do you hear?" the squire said in a threatening voice.

Vassilii began to assure him that he never would.

Then the squire sat the whole evening in his room, looking at his blue book, writing in it; and several times he put his hands up to his face and looked straight in front of him, sighing heavily and shaking his head over and over again.

"If only I knew what was wrong with me," he said to himself. "I must be very ill; I must go again to the doctor at Odoievsk . . . to-morrow, perhaps . . ."

And so life went on in the village. Spring came, summer, autumn and winter—years passed by. It grew cold, and warm again; on these beautiful spring days the peasants livened up a little: on mild evenings the women began to sit together in the open and gossip; the men stretched themselves on the grass, chewing the yellow stalks and thinking of all sorts of things. Then when the damp smell of the soil rose and tickled their nostrils and —over there is a little white flower, and here there's a yellow one—then one or other of them looks up, raises his head a little and looks: there are the women, sitting over there! They are so far off that you can hardly hear their chatter, but when you look hard you can see them quite clearly . . . Women . . .

He gets up and goes across to them.

"Come!" he says to his wife.

The others first jest a little about them—but then they begin to get restless; one after the other gets up and

fetches her husband from the field or even from the wood; there the smell is intoxicating: they look at each other.

"Well, you!" she says, and gives him a push. He laughs: what beautiful days these are!

And all the time the landowner, Szegedin, was sitting up there in his house. The windows were open; he was looking out across the forest. He turned his back on the village—he knew what things were like there now. His heart was heavy, and he did not want to see anything of what they were doing.

"It's a bit quiet here," he thought; nothing more. He caught the scent of spring, and he felt the warmth of spring on his broad paws stretched out in front of him. He looked at his fingers for what must have been an hour. It slowly grew dark.

Suddenly he jumped to his feet: he had a feeling that someone was in the room behind him, looking at him. He often had this illusion.

He turned round, and the room lay open in front of him like the dark jaws of a gigantic beast.

I'm not afraid in the least, he laughed at himself, while his heart beat violently in the darkness—I'm a big enough fellow—as big as the stove!

He felt out into the darkness. The room seemed to be empty.

Was it really empty?

His heart was terribly heavy. If only one could be sure! He shrank back, whichever way he turned.

"There's something there after all! There's certainly someone there! Mother of God of Kazan!"

"A lamp!" he roared.

Vassilii brought in a lamp. The room was empty.

Vassilii seemed to be smiling.

"Shut the windows!" said his master.

When the man had gone Szegedin noted that now, when the windows were shut and the man's footsteps had died away, everything was even quieter than before. The room seemed to have grown bigger than before; outside there was the night. He was all unnerved and exhausted.

He sat down and took out the blue book; it was the record of his accounts, but there were all sorts of things in it as well as figures. For example, under the date of November, when the Bank at Odoievsk had paid out a hundred roubles, there was the comment: "Nadiejda wants to have a child, but someone else has got it" . . .

On January 14th, there was an entry:

"Holy Mother of Kazan, help me, sinner that I am!"

He turned over the leaves of the book, and he heard the rustle of the paper . . . there! there! there it is again —there *is* someone in the room! He jumped up wildly, and the chair clattered over backwards. The stillness had been broken . . . and he screamed as if out of his senses.

"Who is that?"

He opened drawers, looked behind the stove, and the more he hunted the more he seemed to feel the breath of some stranger, the gaze—the fixed gaze—of some person, staring at him. But he could not find him, he could not find him!

He hunted, and kept on hunting for a long time; he dashed hither and thither and beat the air like a blind man, a helpless old man—until he found that there was nothing there but vodka, and then he began soaking and grew calmer.

He sat there—it seemed to him to be getting quieter

all the time. He was staring at the shadow of his head on the table; it was getting blacker and blacker, and all the time his heart was growing heavier: it is so dark, he thought, so dark! His head sank lower on the black shadow, until the light began to flicker and slowly went out. Then at last the room was really still . . .

Vassilii found him in the morning, cowering on the ground in a corner of the room, his back resting against the two walls, with the empty bottle in his hand; his head had fallen forward, and his hair was hanging down, almost touching his knees.

He was dreaming of Semiovskaia. But she had not come up to see him again; true, she had kept the thing quiet, but she would never forget it, for she was of different stuff from these Russians—she had even struggled to the last that time when she had met him in the undergrowth, when she was gathering berries and he had attacked her. She was different from the women of the place: to them such an episode was only fate, an accident—it had happened to many others before; it wasn't so important, and it was soon forgotten. They even spoke of it in the village, and often one of them would say, to irritate her husband in the night:

"The squire is strong, Ilia, very strong!"

Sometimes the men would talk about this and other matters—at night, on the way home from the inn, when it was so dark that you couldn't tell who was speaking. And if someone had been drinking a good deal, he might even start crying, and he would say:

"God will punish him! God is my hope and my light!"

However, Sofia had not forgotten the episode, nor had

she told her husband of it. He had become quite a stranger to her: they seldom spoke to each other. She was alone a great deal: she had time to think, and she would go brooding round, looking for hours at a time at her child's face, crying now and then, when she was alone. Her firm, hard features grew shrivelled and old as time passed; her husband began to look at her often now, and he would keep thinking about her face.

"Is anything wrong with you, Sofia?" he asked her one evening, not long after the baby's fourth birthday.

"No, thank you," she answered listlessly, "there's nothing wrong with me."

When they were alone, she spoke only German to her little Anna, and then later on to her son.

After that occasion he never asked her again why her face had changed, and soon he got quite used to it. He wasn't very different from the other peasants: at the most, he had once been a little more inclined to wander about; he had had dreams of a sort, and he could read. When he was young, he had had the desire and the curiosity to get to know the world—he had wandered all about, doing a little work here, picking up something there; he had come to Germany, and right up to the French frontier; and then he had grown homesick.

Now for many years he had been sitting again in the village, which lay away from the highways; and the habits of everyday had gradually swallowed up every fresh and living thought—he jogged along with the others, growing older, and grey, and he soon got tired—a brother among brothers, a peasant.

But when anyone needed advice or help in a matter on which thought or talk was required, he would go to

Semiovski. "He can read." And Semiovski would put his finger up to his forehead, and shut his eyes, and consider, while the peasants stood round him in respectful silence—for he always knew what should be done.

The peasants would come to him:

"Little brother, this! . . ."

"Little father, that! . . ."

"Tell me what's to be done . . . !"

And so it happened that in the inn one day Piotr asked Nikolai to go up for him to the squire—for he could speak, he was clever—and that had flattered Nikolai, and when he was full of vodka he had promised:

"I'll do it!" he had said, "I'll go to him!"

When he had grown sober again he would have been glad if he had never made the promise, and he kept putting it off from day to day: but then when the peasants met him, and Piotr looked at him reproachfully without saying a word, he began to feel ashamed, and one day he made up his mind.

He had not said a word about it to his wife. One morning he just did not go to work, but set off in the direction of the squire's place. He had gone a couple of steps towards the manor-house, and suddenly he heard his wife's voice quite near him. He had been deep in thought: he turned round, startled.

"Where are you going?" she asked—and she was afraid of something: he could see that.

"To the squire," he mumbled with some embarrassment. "You must know, I promised . . ."

"You're going up there on Piotr's account?—Yes? Is that true, Nikolai? Tell me the truth! You *must* tell me the truth! What's it you're going there for? Not only

about that field! What else are you going for?"

She was quivering with fright: he must know her secret. But she was determined to deny it to the end, she would never admit it to him. That would be like sacrilege. She shuddered, and stood in front of him, a little figure, anxious, with great eyes. There were red patches on her pale cheeks; her eyes were glowing. She spoke without a pause.

He was quite confused. That morning he had not told her of his plan, because if it had miscarried he would not say a word about it.

How bright her eyes are!—he thought, and his heart warmed towards her. Suddenly he saw her once more as she had been—she is not at all an old woman, he saw, and he felt glad that she was taking such an interest in his doings. She is so anxious about him! So anxious! She's not been like that for a long time!

"Yes, Sofia, my child," he said affectionately and frankly—"you know about everything, what's there for me to hide from you?"

His happiness at her eyes being bright and at her showing so much concern moved him almost to tears.

"It is really good of you to be so concerned about me, Sofia," he said with an embarrassed smile. He touched her hand gently, and as she did not draw back he tried to embrace her.

"So it's all right," she said, and gradually her face became as pale as usual, and the red patches faded away; she freed herself from him without another word. She went back: he looked at her, perplexed . . .

It was only later, when she got back to the hut, that she remembered how shy and tender he had been; her

heart warmed towards him, for the least kindness made her feel happy.

"Fedia!" she said to the sleeping child, and she stroked his hair lightly. The boy, without moving, opened his eyes and looked upwards. Just above him was his mother's face. A smile passed over his young, serious features, and then he fell asleep again. His mother forgot her husband: she was happy.

Her husband went up to the manor-house. He was in a very depressed mood; he was suffering, and everything seemed to him to be very dark, although the sun was shining.

"I haven't got a wife, but a piece of stone!" he told himself.

He was very depressed; for he loved her after his fashion. It was only that he didn't know how to begin, and he thought it must come of itself, any understanding between them. His skin was thick enough, but for all that, the tears were coursing down his cheeks.

Then he began to feel angry about it. He felt that he was despised. He made up his mind not to sleep with her for a number of nights: at night—he told himself bitterly—yes, then I'm good enough, then she's affectionate and lively enough—well, we'll see . . .

It was only when he reached the courtyard that he remembered what a difficult business he had in front of him. He felt all topsy-turvy: his heart was beating violently. He wasn't exactly a coward: but when the squire had been soaking he was a very dangerous man.

"Is he drunk?" he asked one of the servants as he passed.

"No!" the man answered timidly, and he looked round and disappeared.

After a while the squire, Ivan Kirillovich Szegedin, came out of the house. He looked old and tired and sleepy, but Semiovski recalled that he had looked just the same ten years back. Tall, and stooping a little as though bent down under the weight of his head, he looked as if he could crush down anyone and was quite prepared to do it. He came staggering along, his arms dangling like ropes. His glance fell on Semiovski.

"Nikolai!" the trembling peasant admonished himself —"you've travelled five thousand miles, you've seen a lot of countries and cities. You're a man: look him straight in the eyes!"

He had once heard that if you don't run from wolves, but look them straight in the eyes, they don't dare to attack you. So he stood his ground firmly, and boldly looked the squire straight in the eyes.

The squire took a step towards him, not a bit surprised —as if he had been expecting him.

"At last," he said. "Nikolai, my son, at last you're here!"

He reeled up to him. Saliva was coming from his mouth.

He's like a barrel, the peasant thought. He was dizzy with terror: he stood there like a hypnotised rabbit, looking at the squire: he had lost all consciousness.

"I know what you—what you're after. I've been expecting you a long time. Come along then, let's have a glass of vodka together! Come along! Don't be nervous, brother, come along!" He put his hand up and took the peasant, numb with fright, by his collar. That brought

Nikolai to his senses: he felt that he was being pulled along, without any chance of resistance, without any hope of being able to defend himself. "Our Father . . ." he stammered.

The squire sat him down in a chair in his room, and thought:

"Now he's come at last to present his reckoning for that German woman; they've hung on till now—well, here he is!"

And a heavy load seemed to lift from his stupid brain.

"But carefully!"—his thoughts ran on—"or it may be a bad business for me: she's a German, and it's forbidden to do anything at all to them—that's the law! How funny: it all comes back to me now—I remember the whole business—and it's so long ago!"

"This must be handled skilfully"—he thought—"very skilfully! I can't just hit him in the jaw, this Nikolai—he can read, he can, he's a fine gentleman: but I—I'm still finer!"

"What have you come for, hey?" He spoke almost calmly, looking at his hands, which were trembling a little. Suddenly he raised his right hand.

Semiovski cowered down in terror and put his arm up to protect his face. But the master did not strike: he was only looking at his hand, which was now trembling violently.

"Master—little father—Ivan Kirillovich"—the peasant said in a voice of supplication—he was still cowering before that uplifted hand, which he thought was about to descend on him—"Lord—I've only come on Piotr's account . . ."

He stopped in the middle of his sentence, as he saw that

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nothing happened to him.

Ivan thought: "He's a clever lad, this Semiovski! He doesn't want to begin with it—but I too won't begin, *I* won't say a word!"

He raised his hand again—this time it was the left. Semiovski seemed to feel it already at his throat—the hairs on that fat hand tickling his neck—he tried to clear his throat, despairingly, as if he were choking—the back of Ivan's hand, he could see, was covered with hair . . .

And Ivan was thinking—how my hand is shaking!

. . . the white of his eyes is quite red!—Semiovski saw —and two furrows go right up from his mouth, through his whole face, as if they'd been rolled in by a barrel!

They looked at each other until their sight blurred. They began to dream: thoughts rushed through their minds. They forgot each other's presence, and did not speak.

A bird chirped as it passed the window.

Ivan crumpled up. In a moment he was the drunkard again. He looked about him in terror, and at first did not see the peasant.

"Who is here?" he screamed, and brought both his hands heavily down on the table. Then he noticed Semiovski, looked at him, closed his eyes and tried to think. Then he gulped a couple of times, and grew calm again.

Nikolai humbly stated his request. The peasant Piotr begged for the lease of the fallow land by the eastern wood—his son Ilia was big and grown up now, he had a wife and soon there'd be a child, and he couldn't get along with what he had now.

"I'll never take on this sort of thing again!" he thought to himself—"Never again! If I only get out of here alive!"

Ivan listened quite calmly, laughed, made a wry face, and his eyes twinkled.

"And what do you get out of it, if old Piotr gets his land?"

His eyes twinkled, and he thrust his head forward, so as to get a good view of Semiovski's face.

"I don't get a thing out of it . . . your Honour, not a thing, by the Mother of Kazan!"

He was trembling all over: what was the squire driving at? What was in his mind?

"And there's nothing else you want, Nikolai?"

"No, your Honour!"

Both of them were trembling. There was a pause. Ivan was reflecting. He rose.

"Very well; Piotr can have the land; I'll write out an agreement . . ."

Semiovski contrived to get out, and as soon as he had passed through the gate he abandoned the slow, cramped steps which he had forced himself to use, and took to his heels. He ran and ran, looking round as he ran, so that he was almost running backwards, for he felt as if something would still overtake him, something would strike him from behind—it was impossible that he should come off so lightly. And so he ran till he reached home.

He fell down exhausted, and it was only after a couple of glasses of kvass that he recovered. And soon the peasants came running from their work, almost bursting with curiosity.

"Well, how was it?" they cried.

Semiovski leaned back slightly. They waited in a tense

silence. He looked from one to the other and then at last began:

"Well, I just went up to see him, and I stood in front of him—of course he was full, as drunk as ever, and he didn't recognise me at all. So he screamed at me: 'What do you want?' So I said calmly: 'Little father, this, and that!' So he asked: 'Why? How? What for?'—and then I explained everything quietly to him. At first he wouldn't—just you listen, Piotr—but at last I talked him round, and he nodded his head, and said:

"'Very well, then! Piotr can have the land. Tell him he can thank you for it!'

"Then he asked what I got out of it when I asked for something for someone else.

"'You're a fine fool,' he said. And then he gave me a vodka, and patted me on the shoulder, as if . . ."

While Semiovski was telling this story to the peasants, Ivan was pacing round and round his room. His brain was now clear.

He knew exactly what he had intended to do—namely, ride over to the farm and have a look at the calf that had just been born—ride out into the beautiful green stillness of the day, as he had put it to himself. He had been looking forward to it: but now he had better stay at home and think things out, he thought.

He looked round nervously, hunched up his shoulders as if he felt cold, and shouted for Vassilii.

"Shut the windows!" he rapped out. Vassilii shut the windows and went out again. Now he was alone.

"We're all just the same," he thought. "We're all of a pattern. I've had his wife, and now he's getting a profit out of it. What's the use of trying to be good?

"If I keep on drinking I'll die soon, the doctor says. But why shouldn't I die soon?

"I don't know how to deal with people: I can't ever get quit of them . . ."

Late that evening Nadiejda came once more to him.

It had been a long, gloomy, lonely evening. It had begun to rain. He had been sitting about; then the door opened and she came. Her eyes beamed on him, and the smooth, soft skin of her cheeks was glowing. And then something strange happened: as he suddenly saw her there by him, with her drooping shoulders, her faint smile and her shy hands, he jumped up and sank down at her feet, burying his head in her bosom.

She only smiled just a little more, but showed no sign of surprise. Without a word she stroked his hair with tender fingers, which sank through his hair and touched his skin. He stayed like that in front of her, motionless and silent—he felt that his head was lying somewhere where it could rest peacefully.

". . . a man can rest peacefully in the bosom of a woman when he thinks she loves him: there's no rest anywhere else in the world"—he thought—"it's terrible!"

"Life is hard!" he was feeling. "We've always got to be thinking of a thousand things, and to be making thousands of decisions. And whatever we do, it's always unjust to someone. Where's the man that can atone for all the wrongs he has done? It takes a criminal to be a good man—at any rate they can atone . . . And always we're lonely—always we've got to be thinking, and acting, and getting things done . . . It's only in a woman's bosom that a man is safe from the world. He can feel

through his eyelids, though they're dark and closed, how warm and trustful her bosom is. Only his hair is exposed, when he's resting in her bosom—but then there's her hand over it. It would be good to go to sleep like this: it's such a burden to have to keep awake . . ."

He stayed there, stretched out in front of her. Tears came into his eyes.

"Little mother!" he whispered.

She stayed with him the whole night, lying with her little knuckles resting tenderly on his fat arms. She was nearly suffocated when he embraced her: she laughed softly, and then more wantonly, egging him on—now, quivering, she flung herself towards him—and now she resisted . . .

She was sleeping. He lay by her, tired and contented. His heart beat quietly as he looked at her: her breath came softly, through her dark red lips, moist and full: it reached him, and he smelt its sweetness; she was sleeping quietly, her soft eyelids were glowing like mother-of-pearl.

Towards morning he fell asleep . . .

He was tired and hungry when he woke up. His head was heavy, and he felt peevish. He looked round. He had been left alone—once more alone, always alone . . .

He jumped up. He saw that the bed was empty and cold. He shouted:

"Vassilii!"

Vassilii came.

"Where is she?"

"Whom do you mean, little father?"

The squire remembered, and said nothing. He gulped. Then:

"The bottle, you sheep's head!"

When the servant had gone, his great tribulation overwhelmed him, and he wept bitterly:

"How alone I am! How utterly alone!"

Suddenly he looked up. Everything was quiet. But outside the rain was still falling, and once again tears came into his eyes. He felt so helpless. And he howled.

"But she must stay here!" he cried, "she must stay here!"

He grew calmer: "I must tell her! I forget about it every time when she's here: You must stay here, you must stay with me—I'll say . . . I can't stick it out any longer! I am ill!"

"What tender little hands she's got!"—he thought; and then—"I must go and see the doctor at Odoievsk to-morrow. To-morrow definitely—to-day it's raining—to-morrow . . ."

(Once he had told her that she ought to stay with him: and then she had turned quite grave, and had sworn that she would never come again and visit him if he tried to make her stay, or if he came to see her: she didn't want any gossip in the village, she wanted to be left to herself, she was very independent.)

"Then who's master here?" he screamed with helpless anger. "If I order it, she must stay here, devil take her! It makes my heart heavy . . . !"

Soon the bottle was half empty: it was vodka, not home-made kvass!

"Vassilii!"

Vassilii crept in dejectedly.

"Who is master here, Vassilii?"

He rose: already he could hardly stand straight.

"You are master, little father—the chief man in the whole district!"

Vassilii backed out of the door with his hand up to his face: how was he to know what might come flying after him?

"He's coming!" he said down below in a hushed voice.

The stable-lad was already there with the mare—he was holding a talisman in his left hand.

The squire came down, and did not see him—his eyes are veiled, like two holes covered by a curtain, the lad thought.

He mounted with an effort, rode a step forward, then pulled up and turned round.

"Vassilii!" he shouted; then, with long pauses between the words—"Isn't there in the village a woman with one hand?"

"Your Honour means Nadiejda—she has only one finger on one of her hands . . ."—for the thousandth time, with an earnest, obsequious expression, Vassilii said his part in the dialogue. He took it quite seriously, though he often thought it laughable.

"That's right! That's right! One finger! Take my stockings, Vassilii—she's to mend the holes: tell her it's my order—I said it—the dirty stockings, do you hear?—that *I* am master here, do you hear? I! I! . . ."

"Yes, little father!"

The squire rode off; the mare, a young animal, leaped forward, and he nearly fell off, but in a moment he had both the mare and himself under control. His legs

squeezed the beast's body so tightly that it groaned—and then they were off.

The servants gathered round cautiously.
"What was that he said?"
"Oh, just what he's always saying . . ."
"What's he got to do with Nadiejda?"
"I don't know: just one of his notions . . ."

Once more the squire, drunk and savage, went careering through the district. He plunged through the fields—slashed round him with his whip—screamed through the howling wind and rain till they heard him from the village—trampled down one vegetable plot after another—hurled his whip-handle through the gay paper curtain covering one of the windows of a cottage—hey, how he's blustering!

The rain came down more and more heavily. The mare was trembling in every limb. Gradually darkness seemed to descend. Hi! Hi!

Men were coming along a dark road—coming from their work, weary, wet through, huddled together . . . then a scream, as the steed plunged on them . . . Suddenly, out of the darkness, the devil! A black face, without eyes—only his bloody teeth gleaming, a giant—steaming, shouting, immense, astride a horse, black and savage . . .

It was gone in a flash. And again everything was still and dark, and the rain fell steadily on the fields. Then they noticed that one of them was lying there in the mud—and across his face, from ear to ear, a bloody weal. The whip! The rain continued to fall . . .

The peasants went slowly homewards, without a word:

what's the use of talking?

Towards midnight the squire came home. Vassilii had been waiting up for him. The horse was trembling and steaming; the squire went slowly up the steps.

"Vassilii," he said, "did you do what I ordered?"

"Little father . . . lord . . . forgive me, but . . ."

"That's all right: here you are——!"

He hunted through his pockets, found a coin and tossed it to him.

Vassilii thought: it's enough to make me laugh—but he felt no inclination to laugh. Many a time before this he had earned coins in the same way—sometimes the squire gave them to him furtively—but he couldn't feel very happy about it. He felt down-hearted.

The squire remained alone. He was very tired. He lay down to sleep, and soon he fell asleep.

Next morning Nikolai, the peasant, pulled on his other boots, beat out his cloak, and went once again up to the manor-house. This time he was already less afraid, but all the same he was not feeling quite happy about it.

No one was in the courtyard. He went up the steps. The door was open, and he went in.

"Your Honour . . ."—he began to say. But the squire had not noticed him.

He was lying in bed, with a towel and a pail of water by his side. He was alone. Now and then he dipped the towel into the pail and laid it again on his head, over his eyes.

Semiovski stood there for a while, and he looked at the man lying there and groaning, helpless, with the

towel over his weary eyes. Each time that he took off the towel to dip it in the pail he stared upwards with a lonely, bitter stare, and the waiting peasant shuddered and trembled. He was not trembling because he thought the squire might see him and do him some injury, but because he felt as if he himself had committed sacrilege, as if he had broken in on something mysterious and holy. But as soon as the squire put the towel over his eyes again, the peasant felt annoyed at his own submissiveness —and yet he felt that he was powerless, and from the dark corner where he was standing he shook his fist at the squire.

When he heard the sound of footsteps in the house he began to be afraid that someone might suddenly find him here. He cleared his throat.

The squire threw the towel aside, and jerked his head up. His face was quite pale.

"Who is that?"

"Your Honour," said Nikolai, "it's me!"

He went forward with hesitating steps: what would the squire do? But the squire went on lying there quietly.

He put forward his requests. One peasant wanted to cut wood in the forest; another wanted to buy out his son, who was in service at the manor-house—one thing and another.

The squire considered for a long time, lying quite still: the peasant had just begun to think that he must have fallen asleep again when he spoke. He said:

"Yes!"

"That was an easy job," thought Semiovski, and he began to go more and more often to the squire, and time

after time, without another word, the squire would say:

"Yes!"

But his irritation and anger grew within him, and became overwhelming. Behind every gesture of humility, every hesitating movement made by the peasant in his timidity, the squire thought he saw only blackmail and accusation.

Very well—he thought—once more I'll give in. But his breath came heavily when Semiovski made his repeated visits.

"It'll soon be enough!"—he told himself—"for a woman like that!" He could no longer keep control of himself. Everything went black when he caught sight of the peasant, even from a distance. He kept thinking of him day and night—saw him standing there in front of him, with assumed timidity, while he impudently and more impudently presented his demands. He, the master—so he evidently thought—had been delivered up to him, helpless: oh, oh, I'll show him!

And then he began to dream of how he would have his revenge—oh! oh! At last there was something to live for.

"I *am* good," he thought. "It's true I sinned, and I'm willing to pay for it—but what's *he* doing to me? He's just squeezing me! Oh! Am I still the master?"

Then he began mocking at himself, and nearly went out of his senses. But he treated his servants with a gentleness and consideration that were quite unusual; he only addressed them as "My little children!" But that made them terrified, and each of them carried a talisman.

"When's the explosion coming?" they asked each other anxiously.

But Semiovski never noticed any of this; he grew more

and more arrogant in his dealings with the peasants, and he asked, and received, more and more from the squire. The peasants looked up to him as if to a Messiah.

"Brothers!" he said to them, swelling with pride—"I'll go up to the squire for you: be easy in your minds, and trust me! Leave it at that, brothers! I'll go to him!"

And he went, and spoke his views like a free man.

And gradually the squire began to notice that the faces of the peasants were no longer downcast and despairing and helpless. They no longer took it calmly when he rode over their fields—they were grumbling more and more loudly, like the rushing of the wind that comes before a heavy storm passing over the steppes.

"That's Semiovski's doing!" he told himself. He closed his eyes tight, turned over the pages of his blue book, or looked at his hands: he raised them in the air—no, they were not shaking. He smiled. He had an idea . . .

But Semiovski still noticed nothing. To him it was all just straightforward and simple—the thought never entered his mind that the squire might be meaning something different from what he said. Why should the squire grant him anything except of his own free will? *He* was the master.

But Semiovski's wife thought a great deal, and she listened here and questioned there. It was not long before she knew all sorts of things: and her husband bragged to her about how boldly he dealt with the squire. But at night, in his sleep, he gave himself away, and his wife, who still often lay sleepless through the night, listened, and put questions, and learnt a great deal. Once she saw

the squire from a distance: he could not see her. He was sitting at the window of his room, with his head resting on his arm, and his expression was so bitter, so infinitely bitter and helpless, that she felt her heart contract, and all at once she realised everything.

She lay sleepless in the hut, amid the breathing of her children and her husband, and she thought: that man, that man, that man! And over and over again she had the sensation of his teeth, and the smell of his breath, in the forest. She almost swooned.

Morning came. The peasant rose.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To the squire," he said, putting on his cap. "It's for Ilia . . ."

"Yes," she answered, "go, just you go! And don't budge an inch, do you hear? Not an inch!"

And she searched and hunted about, and thought of ever new demands with which her husband could go up to see the squire.

Then, and always after—meanwhile the boy had grown to be twelve years old—she went as pale as death when she saw the squire, even from a distance. Sometimes she saw him from her window, passing along outside: huge, awkward, and heavy, with furrows in his face, his hair hanging down over his eyes—she felt her limbs giving way, and she had to sit down and close her eyes—and once again she was in the forest: his flashing teeth, and panting breath, his legs, his cruel arms, suffocating her in their embrace . . .

She went hither and thither, to the women by day and

to the men in the evening, digging up everything, inciting them against the squire:

"That man!"—she screamed.

And the peasants, drunk and miserable:

"What are we?"

"What are we living for?"

"That man!"—she screamed.

Until the others saw blood dancing in front of their eyes, and clenched their fists, and began to rant.

One of them, a young fellow, said:

"The Tsar has sent down a district judge for us, he lives in Odoievsk. We are free men: we can lodge a complaint!"

"Lodge a complaint!"—said old Piotr, nearly weeping—the squire had trampled down his little garden—"lodge a complaint?"

The lamp threw a hard shadow across his white hair and his perplexed, watery eyes.

". . . the judge lives in Odoievsk!"—the young fellow said.

"Masha is beautiful, but she's not ours!"—old Piotr, famous for his proverbs, answered sadly. "The district judge isn't a peasant, he's a gentleman, and . . ."

"We all know that well enough," an old woman interrupted in a resigned and hopeless tone.

They were all silent. There was a pause.

No one wanted to say anything more. What was there to say? What was the use of talking?

At last one of them began to speak, and said to Sofia:

"My father had a father, and he also had a father, and they all lived in one hut: over us there was the squire, and there is still, and always will be! We aren't serfs

any longer, no—the great Tsar, little father the Tsar, has done away with serfdom, but what good has that done to us? The land belongs to the squire, and if he wants to he can drive me and you and all of us out of it—he can do what he likes with us . . ."

What he likes!

This is the hundredth generation of tired men—Sofia thought—even the children are silent, greedy and cruel. They catch rats in snares, and when we're out in the fields they pour oil over them, set fire to them, and start them off. The little girls don't think of crying, they all stand there silently and look on at it.

She said:

"But just have a try with the district judge—or take a stand against him—you're free peasants, aren't you?"

"Ah . . . !"

That was all the answer she got.

Despair settled down on them all. They were silent.

She wanted to try again: she wanted to speak words that would rouse up these weary old men, lying half asleep round the stove, rouse them and make them angry, awake . . .

Then once again she saw the forest before her eyes, smelt the smell of the trees, and of his breath reeking of vodka, tobacco and sweat—and her glance fell on the face of her son Feodor, who still slept in the cradle hanging on two ropes from the roof, although he was over twelve years old. And she could think of nothing more to say—nothing at all. She looked at her husband, at his familiar, old, crafty features: and she was silent.

The people went off slowly, feeling their way through the barn. Everything was quiet.

Nikolai said not another word. He drove the hens into the hole under the stove, put a board across it, and climbed up on top of the stove: there little Anushka was lying sleeping.

"Why is Anna lying there?" he asked.

"She's not well," her mother answered listlessly.

Anushka lay above the stove, on an old skin. All her limbs were hurting, and there were fearful pains in her body. She was lying quite still, on her back, staring into the warm, dark air above her. Her breath came heavily. She could not sleep, not only because of the pain: she had another strange feeling, as if she expected something or someone—something new, something different. At last she fell asleep.

She dreamt a ridiculous dream: something was bending down over her, lower and lower over her body—it pressed her knees apart—she had a sensation of sweetness, of pain, and then again, as if a knife-edge were cutting her: then she screamed and leapt up. It was night, deep and still.

Her parents had been sleeping for a long while—he in his clothes on the bench, with his hand hanging down, and his wife on the table: her clothes had become unfastened, and her breast was showing. The boy had been looking at it for the last three hours—he had not turned away, he had not been able to move: flesh like velvet—he thought—the moonlight, pale and soft, lay on it.

Anushka screamed: the boy gave a convulsive start.

"What's the matter?" their father muttered angrily, gradually waking up.

The mother started up, and quickly pulled her clothes over her breast, with a sharp glance across at the cradle—

the boy was pretending to be asleep. This was the first time that he lied; he never forgot this lie, never, even long afterwards—he was terribly ashamed of it: for the first time he felt this dark feeling of shame. He shuddered when he thought of his mother's open dress, but he did not know why: he turned alternately white and red, hot and cold.

"What do you expect?" the mother answered. "Anna is fourteen—she's a woman now . . ."

"If that's all it is . . ." he said with a yawn, and then he was asleep again.

"No!"—his wife was thinking gloomily—"it's nothing more than that . . ."

Then they all four slept. The cow near them moved. Then everything was still.

The lights in the village had long been extinguished. The moonlight lay pale on the thatch roofs. A rat caught in a snare was crying. A horse neighed. And then silence.

But Nadiejda Sergeievna was still lying awake. She liked to be cleanly, and so she had taken off her clothes and was lying in her slip above the stove. The little child who waited on her by day—now a girl of fifteen—slept on the far side of the barn, in the store-room, where it was also warm. Nadiejda had driven her out of the living-room, because she herself had got into the habit of talking in her sleep.

And now—as there was no one to listen—she had begun to talk to herself not only when she was asleep, but also when she was awake. She had become a very peculiar person in many ways. She was now forty years of age, but she was still very good-looking, and her complexion

was still very delicate. Her blue eyes were pretty and attractive, as was her whole person. Everything about her was quiet and restful: no one had ever seen her excited or crying or talking too much; she was always smiling, gentle, patient and resigned—she was ready to do anything, and she was so calm—she never said an unnecessary word. And for that reason they could not bear her in the village: in the village what they liked was indifference, or passion, dirt, stupidity and coarse jests. But she "is fine," the people would say. And when she went about in the village she even got laughed at:

"With six fingers a girl can't tickle her lover enough, Nadiejda: how will you start off?"

She made no reply, but smiled and passed on. And the joker bit his lips: for if a joker can't get a rise then he himself is the victim; and the others laughed at him.

No one knew anything about her, of what she thought and felt; no one knew of her evenings, her nights—no one bothered about it.

When she thought of it—as she often did in the evenings—then she would stop smiling and her bright blue eyes would grow clouded and heavy—before, when she was younger, she even used to cry—not about the people, but at her own loneliness in the evenings in that room: no sound ever reached her, no love, no happiness! She was alone with her thoughts: all around the village she thought—there is nothing but great white lakes and woods in the winter. It will always be so—she thought—till I am quite old . . .

"If I had died when I was quite small"—she said once, when a little girl had died—"I should now be lying in a little child's grave, and people would pass, and they

would lay on it all the little flowers they had, and they would say: 'See there, that's a little child's grave: there's a dead child in it'—it would have been fine if I had been that child . . . !"

The years had passed swiftly. Sometimes she would think with horror that she was now older—and how much older. And then—a long time after—sitting in her room one evening she heard music: it was raining outside, and she took up a shawl and went out. In the inn—she saw—there was light, and music—the lads and the girls were dancing.

She stood there, stooping forward a little, for half an hour: thin furrows formed in the delicate skin of her cheeks. The night was very dark: inside there were lights and boisterous dancers: their faces shone. She bowed her head, and shivering, soaked by the rain, she looked through the window into the warmth and brightness and life inside the room.

"A child! Just a little child!"—she whispered to herself.

She shrank back and looked round: no one had heard her—there was only darkness, and cold, and rain. The wind drove the rain-drops into her face, and the water on the ground formed little puddles . . . Hey, hey—inside there the lads were clapping their hands, and the girls were singing and screeching, reeling—music! . . . music! . . .

She went slowly homewards.

She lay down over the stove, and lay on her back awake for a long time. She looked up at the roof, and out into the darkness. Her hands were crossed on her bosom. She felt her hands like a great weight resting on her, and she thought—"that's how it must be when one's dead."

She stretched out her feet, and cried. The slight fatigue in her limbs seemed like pain to her; the sound of passionate music was still in her ears, and a forgotten air rose now and then, through the darkness, into her half-conscious thoughts . . .

In the middle of the night she awoke: there was someone in the room, she was sure. She did not move; she opened her eyes.

There was nothing but stillness and darkness, and a steady rain falling outside—then, suddenly, a voice:

"Nadiejda . . . !"

My God, there was someone there after all!

A light shone out from under a cloak—the cold shivers running down her spine stopped, and she calmed down again, when she saw: it's the landowner, it's Ivan Kirillovich! He was wearing a cloak, under which he was holding a lantern. He opened the cloak and the light shone on his face. And now she could look straight into his small, sad, pitiful eyes, with his eyebrows hanging like beards above them. His mouth was quivering like the mouth of a child who is on the point of crying. She felt much more than a match for him!

"Nadiejda," he said softly: it was only half spoken, doubtfully, in an anxious, suppliant tone—"Nadiejda!"

Still she did not speak: it was strange that she should be thinking of something quite different from what was to be done now. She suddenly realised, with an extraordinary clearness such as she had never known before, overwhelmingly, the solution of the mystery which had been obscure to her, the cause of the painful monotony of her life:)

That man!—That man!

She did not look at him. But suddenly she seemed to understand, as clearly as if they were the solutions to a puzzle, the burdensome experiences which had embittered her life. She realised it all in a flash: everything —her isolation, her loneliness, everyone's contemptuous treatment of her—had driven her to stoop so low, to snatch a few hours of spurious happiness. She realised that, though she had gone to him, she had *never, never* yielded her soul to him, that she had *never, never* been truly happy, happy in her soul: that she had never loved, never had any respect for him, this stupid colossus, this steaming barrel that had rolled over her sensitiveness, this sentimental beast. She had never felt any desire, any longing for him—never, never. The thing that tormented her most in her life was shame: for it was not true that she had only wanted a child from him. She had wanted a child, and much, much more than a child: to rest . . . to rest on someone . . . what people call happiness . . . Her instinct had made her forbid him to come near her in her hut or anywhere else—she had wanted to remain clean, as long as it was possible! And when it was no longer possible, doubt and loneliness had overwhelmed her: then up to the manor-house, with her eyes shut, to yield herself up—hopeless, despairing, for it was all in vain.

Now they were face to face, and in that moment all had changed. He had crossed the boundary which she had drawn, and she must decide what to do. She thought that the squire had come to her because he could not hold out any longer by himself: and this was true. He had been afraid that he would go mad: he had such a terrible feeling that there was always someone in the

room—that he could never be alone—his constant terror of this spectre had worn him into shreds. Kvass no longer helped, and even vodka no longer helped—all that was over. To ride through the storm, bellowing, on his mare, leaving in its tracks white flakes like soapsuds, blood like oil-puddles: to ride through the night and the gale-swept forest, raging, hoping, fearing—that somewhere he would be dashed to the ground, and that it would all finish in one second, in a mad whirlwind . . . Slashing his whip across faces in the night, cutting like lightning . . .

But that too no longer helped. When he got home everything was just the same as before . . .

"Nadiejda," he said softly, into the darkness, towards where he thought she was—"I want you for my wife, I want to marry you!"

He said it in a whisper: it was hard to get the words out. Tears filled his eyes: this too, he thought despairingly, will be useless—he might go up to her, and strangle her, or go down on his knees to her: it would all come to the same thing in the end. If he could only forget *everything,* for *one single moment* . . .

". . . to marry you . . . to marry you! I can't bear it any longer. I can't go on being alone, Nadiejda!"

Something occurred to him.

". . . perhaps we'll have children—a child, Nadiejda—I want to marry you!"

As nothing answered him from the darkness, his courage rose and he became more confident; he thought that she was no longer angry with him for coming to see her here. The stillness and the night made him feel better: there was no one wanting to get something out of him. He almost reached the point of thinking: perhaps

now it will all really come right: yes, he already began to believe it, and the tears came into his eyes:

"You'll be the mistress, Nadiejda—do you hear, Nadiejda?—the mistress!"

He came nearer—feeling his way, hesitating—only half a pace nearer, and then she smelt his smell of vodka, tobacco and sweat. Thoughts were whirling round in her brain, one after the other, but none of them were there for more than a second. What was to be done? She was not considering that proposal—to her it was monstrous—but her body suddenly shrank back in terror from this man's smell—never yet had it been so clear to her that she not only did not love this man—no, loathed him, he was horrible . . . !

He was now standing there, silent; against the bright window he seemed to her like a fat, swollen mountain. She closed her eyes. Her courage failed her. "God help me!"—she whispered.

He thought: she is praying; and he did not come nearer.

It will all come out right, he thought, deeply moved. He would like to hear the singing in a wooden church on Sundays in the summer, and a psalm, and to be good —that was what he felt like.

Then she said, quite calmly:

" . . . to-morrow, Ivan Kirillovich, to-morrow—to-morrow let us talk, please . . ."

And as he hesitated, still standing quietly—perhaps wanting to get one kind word—like a verse from the hymn-book on Sunday—perhaps a caress—she said more definitely, out of the darkness:

"I'll come to-morrow—to-morrow evening—definitely—

give me time . . . !"

Her voice came from above the stove like something unreal, piping, thin through the darkness; and this voice from the darkness made him feel very happy: he was almost in tears, and he said:

"Then to-morrow, Nadiejda!"

He wanted to say something more, but checked himself and kept silent, and then turned round and went out.

The door of the room banged, the door of the barn swung to. Then it was quiet: there was only the rain dropping, or coming in great bursts. Once more it was deep night for Nadiejda.

Szegedin went slowly home and lay down to sleep at once.

". . . I shall never touch drink again!" he said out loud. He got up again, took the bottle in his hand, opened the window and flung it out. He shut the window again, and then finally lay down to sleep.

When he woke next morning with a clear head, quite sober, calm and healthy, as he had not felt for a long time, his first glance was to the table: the bottle was there just the same. He looked at it, awestruck: his heart seemed to grow heavy.

". . . did I dream it all . . . ?"

He saw the lantern, and the muddy boots in the corner, and then he burst out into a laugh.

"No, I wasn't dreaming!" he said, and he went on laughing.

The sun was shining on his face: it seemed to be a glorious day. He jumped out of bed and went to the window, pushed it open, laughed loudly, and began to sing:

"This evening, this evening,
I'll go out to little Masha.
Masha mine, little Masha!"

He sang it loudly, over and over again. It sounded absolutely toneless and far too loud, but extremely merry, and the people down in the courtyard were amazed, and looked up timidly. There they saw him laughing, and then for the first time they began to feel the joy of spring, and they laughed too. One of them began to sing softly, and another joined in: the whole courtyard seemed to have changed. The cows lowed, sparrows flew around and chirped and made a row, while the landowner sang in a loud voice always the same song:

"This evening, this evening—
Masha mine, little Masha——"

Meanwhile Nadiejda had been up since early that morning. She asked the girl casually whether she had heard anything—in the night.

"What was there to hear?" the girl asked.

"Nothing, nothing," Nadiejda said. "It was a miserable night, it rained such a lot. I almost thought the rain would sweep us all away and drown us . . . Warm rain —everything looks green outside . . ." she said.

"How nervous she is!"—the girl thought; she was young and strong, and her arms were bare.

But Nadiejda sat there, and her face was ashen.

"What is to be done?"—she was thinking—"what?"

If the sun had not been shining, and it had been still raining, and autumn, she might have been gloomily think-

ing: "Ah! I'll put an end to it . . . die . . . I'm tired, I'll finish with it at last!"

But she too was feeling the sun—strive against it as she might—the sun, the warmth that rose from the fields now showing green: the smell of the fields drifting across to her—how strong it was, how lovely!

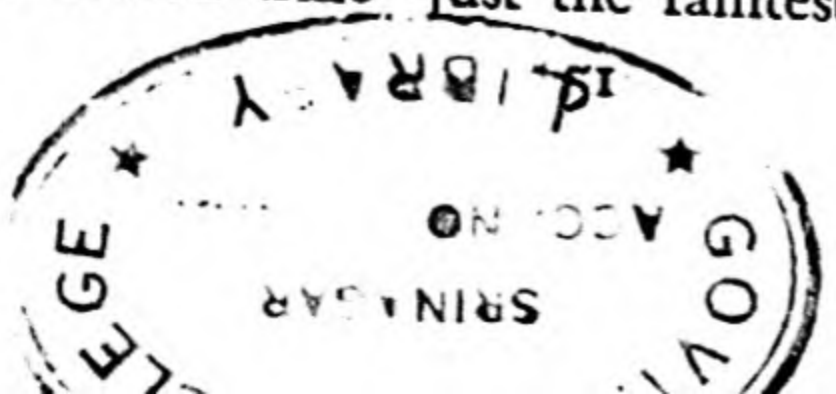
I am alive—she thought—and that something good! And she stretched out her arms.

In the night she went up to him: the thought of not going never entered her mind, for she had promised. She walked along, and as she walked, with the darkness and stillness round her, she grew so tired . . . It began to rain gently again: she no longer had any fear of what was about to happen: she was quite indifferent . . .

He had been sitting there for hours, waiting; he was thinking: now in the spring the days are so terribly long —perhaps by way of an exception she'll come during the afternoon, because . . . because the sun's shining . . .

I'm like an animal in a cage—he thought—I'm longing for the keeper who looks after me and orders me about. And at the same time that he was longing for her, a great dread was gripping his heart.

. . . a man's happy enough when he gets a woman—he thought to himself—but it's the minute after that really counts more—it's only then he can tell whether she loves him, when she—yes—when she does something. That's what he's got to think over: that's how it is, and so—and always the same. . . . Yes, but if afterwards she doesn't turn away, or even perhaps—doesn't want still more—but if, for example, she'd make a caressing movement, if she'd say a word: ". . . darling! . . ."—perhaps—any little thing —some absurd trifle—just the faintest breath of a smile,



perhaps . . . if the girls knew that, he thought, how happy I'd be! . . .

Tears came into his eyes: "—but none of them know . . ."

Gradually it grew dark; he listened at every footstep; in his heart there was an indescribable fear, a fear of something indefinite, that he had got himself into a mess. . . . But at the same time there was animal desire—craving, almost lust—not for her body—ah, that was not what was drawing him to her now—what he desired was for her to belong to him, for him to belong to her—to share her troubles, so that she could share his—to lay his head between her breasts, to rest, to rest—to know happiness—but without the passion to destroy—to rid himself of those stifling sensations—*The yearning for rest*. . . . It was terrible!

He passed through many moods, torn hither and thither by his clumsy, ponderous thoughts—and by degrees his clumsy body began to fill with blood, and the blood mounted to his head.

". . . and who is master over me?" he asked. "Hey?"

Everything was hostile and opposing: Semiovski, the peasants, and even Nadiejda Sergeievna.

"Who's master, then, if she can torment my soul like this?"

It was night now.

"To get rest, just for once . . ." he was thinking.

Yesterday once again he had ridden through the country, drunk and wild, like the devil on his mare, the whip whirling in his hand, among the gardens, the children, the beasts, among the houses and the men who had done their work. And when he hit one of them—hit

him with the whip—the man shouted out, and another, too—they no longer ducked down and blinked timidly—no, they stood there, on their trampled fields, in front of their huts—and they stretched out their rough hands in the warmth of the evening—old women, young lads—peasants—and they all, all of them, all shouted—shouted without words:

"Ai-ai-ai-ai-ai-ai . . ."—pointless sounds, filled with years and whole lives of misery—so that he suddenly turned and became sober, quite sober. He pulled up his mare. Then the peasants came to their senses, and shrank back, and their arms dropped to their sides, and they bowed their rough, tired, hopeless faces before their master: but he pulled the nag round and went home.

In the evening they came to the inn—Semiovski with them, and his wife, too. The lads shouted, music came—they were all excited and tipsy: Semiovski should go up and see him, and make a complaint . . . the day after to-morrow—there was a lot of work for to-morrow, and:

"Semiovski, your health!"

"Nikolai, our saviour!"

"Long live Nikolai!"

Music! Music! Hey! Hey! wilder and still wilder! Outside, the night and the rain were streaming. The girls shrieked, and the lads cried in unison: "Hey! Hey! Hey!"

Outside, Nadiejda Sergeievna stood and looked on; and late that evening the squire came into her hut; and: "To-morrow evening I'll come"—she had said.

Now the time had come. He sat there, squeezing his lips and his eyes tight shut—he thought of something: he held his hands up in the air—no, they were not shaking.

Then there was a light tap on the door—the door opened

and she came in—she had really come.

After they had exchanged greetings she sat down, and said not a word: and he, too, was dumb with excitement.

They sat like that, facing each other—he was nearly fifty, she over forty, two grown-up persons, mature, calm, under control. Each was waiting for the other.

She looked at him. He looked at her, and suddenly, as he looked at her like that, he felt that he must be gentle to her: he saw her narrow shoulders, her pale, thin lips—he stood up—perhaps intending nothing more than to stroke her—just to touch her with his finger, perhaps on her shoulders—just a gesture, a little gesture—before what would follow. But as he got on his feet, when he had taken not more than half a step towards her, she rose and turned pale, and held out her arms mutely against him:

He is coming! So now again he wants something from me!

Her face grew cold and hostile—helpless, and filled with opposition. It was no longer gentle—no longer in any way reassuring. . . . Before he had completed his first step he halted, and saw: ". . . everyone is against me, everyone!" He was shivering: he felt utterly chilled. It came over him: "It's all in vain . . ."—and he sat down again, holding up his head with his hands. He realised that she had rejected him.

A pause. Silence.

Everything was still; the little oil lamp was burning; it was dark night outside.

Suddenly he jumped up. He had lost all control.

Rest . . . !

His face had changed; he was on his feet. His cheek-bones were jutting out sharply, so that his eyes seemed

sunken. His head was bowed a little forward, between his shoulders. He glowered down at her: and suddenly terror seized her like a throttling clamp. In that moment she knew that she was lost—that that object was now a beast—an Asiatic, a cruel devil, who would revenge himself just as she would like to revenge herself for her hopeless life—she knew that now it was all over with her. The thing that she had always been waiting for had now come! She jumped up—there he was, standing in front of her—she looked him straight in the face, the pupils of her eyes glowing—in a moment he would go mad—throttle her. . . .

Then she screamed out—foaming at the mouth, almost inhuman, throwing off all restraint as she had never done before—she felt so much better for being able at last, at last, to scream: she wanted to have the last word: she felt that the next moment, out of pure helplessness, he would kill her:

"Never—never—would I have married you, that at least you know, you swine, you beast, you . . ."—she flung out—"never, do you hear, never! I loathe you! I despise you! I have always, always despised you! You are more repulsive to me than a pig! I wash my hands for hours after you have touched them . . ."

She was deadly pale. Her eyes shone as they had never done before; her whole body was taut, hard, determined; her face was distorted. It was as if some hidden wheel in her had now begun to turn, and no one could stop it, not even she herself; she was startled at herself, but there was no turning back; in any case it was the end . . .

"Perhaps you thought that I loved you—that I was fond of you—ha! *I was just amusing myself!* I've felt shame

for you, to see you cringing round me! You weakling! How you've sighed to me—'Love!'—'Darling!'—you swine, you swine, you stupid . . . !"

Her eyes were almost brimming over, her voice shook, her hands were beating the air—her face was growing whiter and whiter: she knew that in a moment she would collapse. She screamed:

"You, you swine . . ."

. . . one last screech, in which there were neither words nor tone—and then he flew at her: with one movement he had his right hand behind her neck—it nearly wrenched her neck off. He was holding her: she could not move—her voice broke off, turned into a yelp, but still she hissed out:

". . . clean, I am clean! Don't touch me! Don't touch me! . . ."—then he pulled her towards him, still with only his right hand round her neck—blood was in his eyes, and over them, for she had struck him in the face—she had hit him . . .

With his hand behind her neck he pulled her to him, quite slowly. She was silent now—how still it is!—he thought suddenly. She stared at him, horror-stricken, but with the last remnant of her pride, and overwhelmed with terror. Then he put out his other hand—his left hand—held it up in the air for a second—no, it was not trembling. The woman bowed her head—now, she thought, the deadly blow is coming—she closed her eyes: then. . . . But he only reached out his hand, and with one tug pulled her dress and her under-clothes from her body—they fell to her knee, and she stood there naked to the knee.

Then he looked at her, quite calmly: he had never yet seen her quite naked in the light: she is old, he thought,

calmly and coolly—when such a woman gets old, her skin grows loose and lukewarm—no longer firm, and hot or cold. He even said this, aloud or half-aloud, as if speaking to himself: then he relaxed his grip of her, and she collapsed like an empty sack.

"Vassilii!" he called.

She was half conscious, half in a swoon. Vassilii came: she whimpered.

"Get this woman away—send her through the middle of the village—yes, as she is, naked! Take her to her hut: she has been pestering me: if she ever so much as looks into the courtyard again, give her a couple of lashes with a whip!"

Another idea occurred to him:

"One moment! You can take her into the forest and have a little game with her, too!"

"Out with you!" he screamed, as the servant stood and looked at him. "Out with you!"

Vassilii began to grin:

"Very good, master—I'll take her to the forest!"

She lay across his shoulder like a bundle, motionless; he went out, and was going to shut the door with his foot, but the squire shut it himself.

In the middle of the night the man came back; as he saw a light still burning in the squire's room, he went up, knocked, and opened the door—the squire was standing there still, just as he had left him.

The man grinned.

"Little father, she . . ."

At that the squire looked up, saw him, and before Vassilii could get out of the way struck him such a terrible

blow that he fell backwards, unconscious, through the door and down the steps. He just lay there. The squire closed the door.

Vassilii never got over it. His respect for the squire was boundless. No one ever heard a word about it.

The squire got out his blue book—and then he rested his fat, swollen face on his hands.

The light went out.

Early next morning the squire went down as usual into the village.

"Nikolai," he said to Semiovski, who had been just on the point of going up again to see him—"you're an industrious fellow, and I'll sell you a young mare: I've no use for her, would you like her? You needn't pay for her at once, there's plenty of time, by the harvest, or later . . ."

And how Semiovski wanted a horse! His heart leapt with joy. The bargain was completed.

The squire went back to the manor-house, and called Vassilii:

"Vassilii," he said, "here are five roubles"—he held up the great round coin for Vassilii to see. It glittered in the sun. Vassilii could not take his eyes off it. "If you do what I want you to do, you can marry Sossia, and you'll get a piece of land from me: if you don't do what I want, I'll kill you and Sossia . . ."

"Your Honour," Vassilii said in a tone of great frankness and humility, while he shivered like a wet dog, "don't I do whatever you order me to do?"

He was thinking: the squire is right in everything he does, for he is the squire. What business had I, for example, to go up to him last night, when he hadn't called me?

". . . I do whatever you order, anything, little father!"

But it was like drink rising to his little brain.

"Sossia! My own land! Children! No longer a servant! A little pipe! Vodka, as much as I want! . . ."

". . . whatever you order . . . !"

The squire leaned forward, and looked piercingly at Vassilii.

"The mare we have in the stable . . ."

"The sick one?" Vassilii whispered, "the one that's infectious?"

"Yes, *that's* the one I mean. You understand?"—the squire said emphatically—"the one . . ."

Vassilii's face did not change.

That evening he took the mare to Semiovski.

Another dawn broke, overcast and gloomy. The clouds sagged heavily down from the sky.

Semiovski woke up, yawned loudly, and opened his eyes. The air was moist and clammy, rising up from the thick clothes in which he slept year in, year out, rising up from the heavy breathing of the children who were now no longer children. The air in this little room was filled with the dull weariness of the night, the grey mists and the fields which stretched, fat and substantial, in front of the window. He had no inclination to be the first one up. God, life is a sad business!—he thought.

The boy, Feodor, was still asleep: he was lying in the basket which hung down on two ropes from the roof, because he did not fancy sleeping on the ground. He lay in the basket in which he used to sleep as a child, and he huddled up his thin legs, or else he hung them out over the side. When he was five years old he should have left

the baby's basket, but the little chap didn't want to sleep on the ground. Blows did no good: the boy was thick-headed—he had his own ideas.

"Why won't you sleep on the ground?" they asked him. "What's the reason? Why don't you want to?"

"I just don't want to!" was the answer—emphatic, definite, final. He just has his own notions, said his father —and was proud of him for it.

His only teacher was his mother: she taught him to read and to count—all in German—while from his father he learnt how to take hard blows—to strike hard when it was right and necessary.

Once when they had grown used to the boy's notion of sleeping in the basket the father said as a joke: "If another baby comes, you'll just have to get out!" They all laughed. The boy turned quite pale: he did not join in the laugh, and said nothing. No one took any notice.

But from then on Feodor was always looking at his mother, to see if perhaps she was getting another baby. His suspense became a mania: he had long ago forgotten whatever childish reason he had had, and now he was only conscious that his mother might at any moment carry out an act of malice, an attack against him, his rights, his person. He felt that he must be on his guard. He would even, he thought, be prepared to commit murder if that would make sure that his mother would not get another child. During those years no other idea impressed itself forcibly on his mind, and for that reason the basket in which he slept became the most important thing, the most personal thing, the weak point in his life. He would lie awake for whole nights—singing softly to himself to keep himself awake—and cough when his

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parents wanted to get closer to each other; in this way he tyrannised over the whole household, and his parents were ashamed to speak to him about it. When they did come together, it was in secret, like something sinful, in a hurry—with one eye always on the boy. He was now seventeen years old—a short but thick-set lad.

Feodor rose, yawned, clambered down from his basket and went out of the room: in a moment he was clear of the heavy smell of the night and the mist: here in the shed there was a harder, sweeter smell of cold and dung. And an extraordinary stillness.

The boy pushed open the door leading into the open—the clear air from outside swept in, softly and gloriously, perhaps still soaked with the mist from the fields, but still, air of the open spaces—ha! to fill his whole lungs with a deep breath! His eyes blinked: he had to accustom them to the brightness of the day. Then he turned round . . .

There the cattle were lying, with glassy eyes: in the darkness of the shed he saw: *glassy eyes!* The mare, the cow and a calf only a few days old were lying there: the calf was still whimpering—it lifted its head—the glowing black eyeballs were filled with pain.

The boy started back, as if someone had struck him in his face. Out of the depths of his indifference, his boredom with the everyday round—he was suddenly faced by the suffering of a living creature—eyes which were bursting. . . .

He stared at them: for the first time in his life he saw in front of him the fight against death—the last rattling gasp for air, the terrible, dumb, helpless struggle. The calf whimpered a little, collapsed, and it was over.

The boy screamed, and broke down altogether.

From that day on bad luck dogged Semiovski. A few days later poachers or wild beasts destroyed his sowings—everything was broken down, laid waste and trampled underfoot.

When they heard about it, the peasants and the women left their work and ran to Semiovski's field. There he stood, small, pale, the stubble of his beard sticking like thorns in his bloodless cheeks—helpless, mute, with folded hands, looking at what had been his pride: *all* trampled down—*all* spoiled—*all* lost . . .

That morning when the peasants were in the fields the servant Vassilii went into the village, as he did every week, to kill the rats which had been caught. They were brought in their traps to an open space, and the village children gathered round to see the sport. When all the traps—with their captive, dumb rats in them—had been collected, a boy said to Vassilii:

"Vassilii, we'll pour oil over them and burn them!"

"You dare!" said Vassilii, as usual. "Come, pick them up, we'll take them out in front of the village, or the rats' blood would flood the houses. . . .!"

The children winked at each other, and each of them took one of the traps and carried it off like a trophy: little cages, and in them terrified, vicious little beasts—tormented by the brightness, by their cramped prisons—frightened by the noise, by the movement. They looked at each other through the bars, crying or squeaking softly across to each other.

Behind, some distance in the rear, two boys crept along with cans which they held hidden behind their backs.

Vassilii turned round once, but no doubt he did not notice them or what they were carrying. He came to a halt in front of Semiovski's house, which stood apart from the other houses.

"Ah, children," he said, "just think how stupid of me: I've forgotten my big stick that I was going to kill them with: wait just a moment! I'll come right back—I'll be here again in a minute."

His features moved convulsively: his hair fell over his eyes and he threw it back with a toss of his head. He glanced back once again, and then went off towards the manor-house, where he had left his stick.

The squire was standing at the door.

". . . well . . . ?"

". . . everything in order, little father!" the man replied: and he thought: "I'm a lost soul! Holy Mother of Kazan, do a miracle . . . !"

And already then, down below in the village, a sea of flames was rising—hey! hallo! rising to the sky! The rats ran round, screeching and burning, stopped in their mad race, and in a moment they were ashes . . .

When the children saw that Semiovski's house was in flames, they ran off; only one small girl remained standing there. She thought:

"I was obedient. I didn't pour any oil on the traps and set them on fire; it was the boys, they did what Vassilii told them not to do, but I did what I was told . . ."

She had looked on with cold, observant eyes. The shrieks of the little animals did not move her in the least. They darted hither and thither, twisted round—all the twenty of them burnt like paper, but it seemed to her that there were a thousand of them, they darted about and

shrieked so much—they shrieked, shrieked to the sky like nothing on earth, those little animals . . .

Then the house flared up! The little girl stood there as if she were rooted to the ground.

People came running—they all wanted to see the sport—they ran along, shouting, screaming, tumbling over each other. Then, suddenly, they thought of doing something about it, and everyone began to give advice. The peasants' faces were gleaming red. They were very excited, and they shouted at each other: one knew of one thing, another knew of something else.

"We'll put out the fire!" some of them screamed. And in a moment the women were bringing water in buckets of every kind. The women got together, and without wasting words they formed a long line to the next hut, and the children, merry but frightened, joined in the game. The pails and buckets passed from hand to hand, and the glow of the fire slid over their excited faces. The smoke rose straight up. It was terrifying, but at the same time beautiful. The roof burned and crackled mysteriously, it glowed brightly—yellow flames pierced the air, merrily dancing in the gentle breeze—this way, that way.

At that moment Semiovski came running from the fields as if insane: his wife behind him like a madwoman. It was comic, the way they ran; Feodor came, too; Anushka was sitting quite quiet in the road, crying into her hands.

The glow from the fire lighted up the land all round—though it was quite a bright day—and people came from everywhere to see the conflagration.

Hey! How it burnt!

Now the women stood still, and their long chain broke

asunder—it was useless to throw buckets of water into the flames. The sparks flew out, hissing, crackling, and vanished. The black pillar of smoke that rose straight over the house began to lean, and suddenly broke off and collapsed, twisting round, darting sideways among the women, who screamed and scattered.

The air glowed red and shimmered with heat. Even when all was over the sparks still spurted out towards the trees on the west.

Semiovski then stood in front of what had been his home: a heap of rubbish and ashes: a patch of land in which nothing was green or bright. There he stood. A small pail, glowing and warped, rolled out from among the burnt-out logs.

He, the peasant Semiovski, stood there—and at that moment he was not thinking of what his future was to be. He leaned on a stick and called up in his mind—dreamed, so to speak: that's a little, cool house—he seemed to see it—there in the middle, as you come in, is the stable; there's the cow lying; there it's warm and the smell's comforting—left and right of the stable, there's a door each side: left, to the store-room, where it's cold—that's where the potatoes are, and the vegetables, and the salt—the door on the right leads into the living-room. You go in: it's half dark, the ikon is hanging there in the corner, and you cross yourself. Under the ikon is the bench for the dead, and near it there's another bench. That's where you stretch out, with your arm under your head, and have a rest, when it's summer and everything's quiet. Father, too, used to lie on that bench and dream—and grandfather—and mother, too . . . ah, mother!

Often in the clear frosty nights, when the wolves howled

and the stars fell right into the room, you'd lie above the stove—that was when mother had died, soon after father—there it was warm: under the stove the hens would be clucking in their sleep.

". . . the hens!" he screamed out suddenly, and woke up from his dream. Over and over again he screamed despairingly: "The hens! the hens! . . ."

He screamed and howled like a child: "The hens!" But he meant something quite different: he meant his home, the living-room, the darkness in the evening, the quiet—his home—the memory of his whole life—and then his mother, with her hard hands—and now it struck him that he himself was old, an old man . . . "I'm quite an old man: now I'm standing here . . ."

Still the last sad sparks were flying: the timbers were glowing. The smoke grew pale, and sank down. Evening came.

Some distance off his wife was standing. She was quite calm, looking quietly across at where her husband stood screaming about the hens as if he were possessed—"as if he'd gone mad," she thought—"perhaps he has gone mad."

It surprised her to find how everything seemed to have suddenly become so far away and unimportant to her. She could talk to herself about the blow that had fallen as if she were talking about the moon or something to eat. She could exchange smiles with one of her neighbours at that little man—that man over there who seemed to have lost his reason about the hens—at that heap of ashes—at all these people, these filthy peasants—so her thoughts ran on.

Suddenly it struck her: now everything's going to be different! Almost triumphantly she asked herself: What

now? We still have life left! Now the everyday round and the dull monotony are things of the past! Now it's beginning to be interesting!

She bit her lips in a sudden access of joy, and she looked over at him again—she could have laughed aloud.

She noted that he had grown quiet—she saw tears running down his face—she saw—and her laughter slowly died away—that he had sunk down, that he was shivering as if with cold—his hands jerked convulsively, and suddenly fell to his side. What he was doing showed such despair . . .

"After all, I'm his wife," she thought, and she felt a pain that made her head droop on to her breast. Suddenly she felt that she must think about him in quite a different way. She fixed her eyes on the smouldering remnants of the logs. What a lot was burning there . . .

Hot tears came into her eyes: she could not stop them. Her home had been burnt: long, quiet evenings, happiness, darkness.

Feodor smiled: ". . . it's pitiful how he's howling." And then: "Now I'll have to sleep on the ground after all. . . ."

He looked at his mother, and as he looked at her a feeling of sympathy rose in him, but he crushed it down. He felt the fresh breath of the approaching night: things will be changed, he thought, the old place is burnt down—now father will have to work for someone . . .

He went on thinking about their changed fortune, and soon began to feel quite curious as to what was going to happen. He pictured to himself that this and that would happen, and he looked across at his father. Then he saw that his father had stopped screaming—suddenly he saw

his mother's eyes fill with tears, and her head droop. It was evening: the last few sparks glimmered softly among the trees: soon everything had been consumed, and people went away silently—now he was alone. Then suddenly he was gripped—as by some mysterious giant's hand from which no escape was possible—by the oppressive feeling that he belonged together with those broken, unfortunate parents of his—those parents who, alone and separate, had sunk weeping to the ground because of the home which they had lost. He could not restrain his emotion: his heart filled with love for them. He rose and went to his mother, and held her hand in an embarrassed way: she looked up and raised herself from the ground. He held her hand in his tight grasp: she went with him, and he put her hand into his father's hand.

After all they are my parents, these unfortunate people —he thought, and he shook his head. He did not like the sensation: his heart seemed strangely heavy. He wanted to laugh about it, but he could not manage to laugh.

By now night had settled down over them, and everything was still. For the first time in his life the mysterious charm of sadness overwhelmed him, made him feel helpless—and he buried his head in his mother's bosom; she opened her eyes again, looked at him and then at his father, whose hand she was holding: she laid his father's hand on the boy's forehead. Now they were all still, with their knees drawn up.

Night. Silence.

That morning Semiovski began drinking. His wife and Feodor had fallen asleep by his side, for it was still warm

there with the slowly fading glow of the iron and the dark fumes: overpowered by tears, weariness and warmth they had fallen asleep. Only old Semiovski remained awake—he felt his wife's hand grow limp in his, and the boy's head sank down to the ground under his other hand. Anushka had joined them—she had been asleep for a long time—a miserable little child, worn out with weeping. Semiovski got up quietly—the others did not wake. The corners of his thin, pale lips were twitching convulsively; he passed his hand over his head.

He walked away slowly, and everything remained still—nothing moved. He looked about him: there lay the dark ruins of his home, a heap of rubbish, from which smoke rose in a thin column. There were his wife and his son and Anushka, his little daughter, and they were sleeping, they were so tired . . . he smiled a little, but there was something wrong with the smile, because the skin of his cheeks had suddenly become too small, too tight.

"I'll drink some good liquor"—he thought—"my mind is too set, it must be loosened a bit. I must think a little: I've lots to consider now! A little good vodka, a glass, two glasses . . ."

He went across to the inn. Day was breaking.

His wife and the children were sitting now in front of the burnt-out logs. They had wakened up, cold in the grey dawn, and had huddled close together. They were silent. Anushka shivered. They waited.

They fell asleep again. Day came, and they slept. Afternoon came, and evening—the people did not disturb them. Then Semiovski returned from the inn, and they woke up. He was carrying a yellow lantern, swaying from side

to side: his eyes were shut, and his little fox-like face was soiled with earth and drink. He was bawling in an unsteady voice; the three looked at each other and then did not dare to look at each other again. They saw him: there he was coming. He was singing. When he paused, it was still as death: there was only the gentle breeze in the trees . . .

Vassilii reported as much of this as he could to his master: the latter had not left his room, but was lying thinking, with his arms stretched out on the table. His eyes wandered uncertainly hither and thither—he could not get to sleep. When Vassilii had reported everything and was allowed to go to sleep—he had to shut the windows before he went—the squire sighed deeply: his heart had grown heavy, and he said to himself:

"To-morrow definitely I must go to Odoievsk!"

He looked round timidly.

"I'm ill!" he said, almost in tears. "It's a fact, I'm very ill. Everything happens differently from what I'd intended."

He repeated the words once or twice—each time more faintly—and went on muttering them. Then it seemed to him that he was asleep: but he knew quite well that he was only going off to sleep, and that he could wake up at once if he wanted to; but "as far as I'm concerned," he thought, "I can be asleep now: very well! In a moment I'll be dreaming!"—he thought. He had not thought it right out before the door opened, and his dead wife came in.

"But that's strange," he thought, "she's dead all right, there's no doubt about that!"

And he tried to think of some explanation of it. Yes,

that's it! He had once heard something about people in a trance.

"Perhaps she was only in a trance, then!"

He came to that conclusion quite calmly, with no trace of excitement, of joy or fear.

"Well, there you are, then," he said, getting up. "So you were only in a trance? Where have you been hiding all this time?"

"I had so much to do," she answered, in her rather quavering, crystal-clear voice, "but now I'm here again. It's time, too! You've been doing some pretty things here while I've been away, hey?" She chided him in her good-humoured way.

"Yes, Marushka," he said, with a touch of raillery in his tone. But, in fact, he was very pleased, and he became quite humble as in the old days—"it's good you've come. I'm so confused, you can't think, I don't know what to do; I'm terribly confused, everything's topsy-turvy and confused . . . !"

He would have liked to blot out, to make as if they had never been, all the irritating things that had happened during her absence. But at the same time, and even more, now that she was there again and would look after everything, he wanted to rest—just to rest—to leave to her, with her light-hearted efficiency, the settlement of those matters that were troubling his conscience.

"I'm so clumsy," he said. "If only I hadn't to think out and decide everything myself! There's so much of it that becomes false and evil when it's done and over. Then it all seems quite different from the way it seemed when I was thinking it out beforehand. And I thought it out very carefully, Marushka . . . !"

"I know it all," she said. "You're a poor, miserable man —Vassilii has told me everything . . ."

Then he broke down in front of her. Tears streamed from his eyes—she knew everything!—he thought—she is good! Now my guilt's off my shoulders—now everything will come right . . . !

"What must I do?" he whispered.

She bent over him, so that he caught the familiar fragrance of her breath, and now that he looked up he saw—her lips, which were whispering—whispering so affectingly that his soul was gripped:

"You must pray, Ivan—pray!"

She nodded towards the corner, towards the ikon of the Mother of God.

". . . pray, Ivan! . . . pray a great deal . . . !"

She stopped, as if exhausted, and leaned back.

"Yes!" he thought, and a great wave of happiness, of joy and liberation, rose in him. "Pray! Pray! How is it I never thought of that! Pray to the good Mother of God! How could I have forgotten to do that! Pray! . . . She will console me, she's gentle—she has good, cool hands, she'll put them on my forehead! Such gentle hands! *Two* such hands! . . . Yes . . . pray! . . ."

". . . and also you mustn't drink any more!" her deep voice broke into the quiet of his thoughts—"do you hear? No more drink!"

Her voice grew more gentle, and she explained the matter to him: ". . . for that's what drives you out of your senses and makes you do wrong things! No more drink, do you hear?"

She got up slowly, while he, sunk in his thoughts, was not fully conscious of what she was doing—she went to

the bed and got up into it: now she was lying there.

". . . and just leave the women alone!" she said from over there, as if she were already half asleep. "After all, it's *I* that am your wife, isn't it?"—her voice came from far, far away—"isn't that so, Vania?"

Then he wanted to rise from where he was kneeling, to go to her quickly and tell her how grateful he was to her—he got up . . .

Then there was nothing around him but the deep stillness of night; in front of him, on the table, a little oil lamp was burning, lighting up a tiny patch. The walls of the room lay covered by darkness.

"Maria!" he called, half aloud, hesitatingly. "Marienka!" —a little louder: "Mariushka!"

Everything was quite still.

He stood up quietly, so as to make as little noise as possible, and on the tips of his toes took a step towards the bed. He whispered, half incredulous but yet filled with hope, a quick:

"Maria . . . !"

He took another step forward, and stood still:

"Masha . . . !"

. . . yet another step—despairingly, wildly, he gasped: "Masha!"

. . . a leap towards the bed—he felt it with his hand, first gently, tenderly, then more and more fiercely—sprang back to the table, snatched up the lamp and held it forward to light up the massive bed. Once more, with the roar of a wild beast, he screamed:

"Maria . . . !"

He held the light up—here, behind there, in every corner, everywhere—and screamed:

"Maria!"

Nothing. He was standing there.

Everything was quiet—a terrible stillness.

The stillness became unbearable: it took giant shape, and pressed him down—pressed on his neck. He tried to speak, but he screamed. Then an idea struck him. He took the lamp and hurled it with all his strength at the ikon of the Holy Mother of God, which was there in the corner, lonely and dark. The lamp flew through the air—flared up—went out—flared up once again—struck—carried the ikon with it—it heeled over, and something fell heavily—it rolled—a slight echo . . .

Darkness . . . Stillness . . .

Then he rushed to the door, and out—down the steps—to the gate, and out—ran through the village like a wild beast—and at last he reached the forest.

He stood still—there was no window still showing light—he looked all round, and crept towards a little door—and suddenly with a single blow he drove it in. A terrified girl came out of the darkness, in her shift. Her eyes were quivering.

"Nadiejda Sergeievna!" he said abruptly.

The girl:

". . . But she's not here, little father! She's drowned herself or hanged herself or stabbed herself or . . ." Her teeth were chattering with cold and fear.

The squire swung round.

In the morning Vassilii found his master sitting there in his room, as he had left him overnight. It was evident that he was ill: his face was red and puffy, and his speech was thick; he stuttered, and his eyes were quite black.

Vassilii was sick with fright: he took a horse to go and fetch the doctor from Odoievsk.

The doctor was not in—he had gone into the country somewhere. Vassilii left a message for him to come later; but the doctor did not come, even later, and the squire got well again even without him. He went, as soon as he could, down into the village—limping painfully and gloomily along the road until he met Semiovski: he asked him abruptly whether he would come into his service. Semiovski said: "Yes!"—he was trembling; he was probably drunk again. But what could he do?

The squire went up to his house again, and the life of the village went on and on: a long chain of days, with everyone wearily pulling himself along its links—but still sometimes secretly hoping to find the end of the chain one day and to start on something fresh: but sooner or later everyone saw that the chain was closed and round—without beginning and without end, a circle.

Everything in the village came along in its regular order—everyone lived as before, and life crept on a little further. People worked—babies were born—old people died.

Semiovski had gone into the squire's service: he was working in an outlying farm by the eastern wood. He lived there with his family, for Feodor, too, had to work on the farm. He was a powerful lad, now nineteen years old—he did not talk much, but made no secret of the fact that he did not like hard work. And even in the new hut he did not sleep on the ground, but—as there was nowhere else—on the bench for the dead, under the ikon of the Madonna. He even had a girl, Akulina, with whom he carried on in secret: he was not particularly fond of her, but she could rouse his passion. It started with their

meeting each other in the forest: he was coming from the far side, from the eastern edge, where they cut wood; she was gathering berries.

"Well . . ."—he said as he met her, and was going to pass by: he was very tired and hungry. He had been busily thinking out something, as he always did when he had to walk by himself—this time, it was about plants, and whether they could talk in their own way. He had put it to himself very clearly, and had been considering this and that aspect of it—and all at once it had seemed to him obvious, as he had often heard said, that plants did really speak—all plants: trees, grass, cabbage, berries, onions and wild pinks—all of them.

They were speaking all at the same time. "Quiet!" he said, and smiled with pride because they all obeyed him at once in alarm, and were silent—just at that moment he woke as if from a dream and saw a bright kerchief through the trees—then Akulina, a girl from the village. He was torn from his fine ideas, and he was a little irritated—he muttered a greeting, saying "Well!"—and was going to pass on.

But Akulina did not want to let him pass; she was a sturdy, well-built girl, with strong features, arms, legs and movements. Only her hair was fair, almost timidly fair, in contrast with the firm healthy colour of her face and her red arms. She was eighteen years old, and up to then had not seen much of life, and all in all she was a quiet, sturdy Russian girl, uncomplicated, silent, but for all that full of fire. Now she wanted to learn something of life.

She stood up straight when she saw him coming. Her dark blue eyes were gleaming.

"Feodor . . . !"

All the girls in the village liked him—Fedia, yes, Fedia! —they spoke about him, they tittered—and they thought of him, too, when they hugged each other. Feodor! Slim, short—serious—much, much cleverer than all the lads in the village put together, and so stand-offish!—Not one of them could boast of any experiences with him. But all of them dreamt about him . . . !

She stood up straight, and so he had to stop. She was excited. Her vigorous blood rolled more quickly—she could feel it moving . . . .

". . . where have you been?" she asked—and then, seeing his expression of weariness and indifference, added quickly:

"I want to ask you something, Fedia; will you let me ask you something?"

She blushed, more at herself than because of him: for she had nothing whatever to ask him and could not think how she had managed to say that to him. What had put it into her head?

But as naturally as if everyone in the world was in the habit of coming to him to ask him something, he stood there twirling a blade of grass in his fingers, and asked:

"Is that so? What's it you want to ask me, then?"

She stood quite still, and did not move; there was a moment's silence. Then it struck him how still it had suddenly become. It can only become quiet if there's first been a noise—he thought.

In a moment he had forgotten the girl again and had become immersed in the stillness of the forest—his eyes were staring at nothing. They became dreamy, and he looked into the green foliage: in the distance the sun was still on the branches—a twig crackled and was still—

warmth, sun, fatigue, stillness: how beautiful it was! Now the trees were saying something to each other, softly: they thought he couldn't understand, but he understood it quite well: what was it they were saying? They were saying, pointing down at him, their eyes twinkling, with a faint smile—old, benevolent, fat—"Well then, you down there with the girl!"

Ah, yes, the girl! His eyes began to see again—the beautiful, peaceful dream was over. A girl is standing there all right!

He looked at her quite calmly. She was waiting, and let him look at her without a word.

Indeed—it struck him—he had never seen a girl before just like this—in the stillness and warmth of the evening—alone—and: she wanted to ask him something?

He was generally shy of girls—he had never yet danced, never kissed any of them, never touched any of them—at any rate, except for once—one, his sister: and never again since then. She had been sleeping then, without a care, only half covered, one summer afternoon: then he had come into the hut and seen her lying there. He had gone slowly closer to her and had sat down; he had sat by her for a long while and had looked at her, quite detached and cool: he forced his mind to comprehend what that was in front of him: *a woman!* And what was a woman? He heard such a lot about women. He thought so often about them. He worried about it, but he could not speak to other people about it. What was there so special about women? Soft breasts, soft cheeks, thighs and a soft, round body—"comical!" he thought—"why is there anything so special about it? Is that what so much fuss is about?"

He smiled, but he almost realised then that he was

deceiving himself; and then he twice touched the small, white breasts, and a tremor he had never experienced before—terrible, strange, delicious—ran through him. She did not wake up. He was very startled, and crept out of the room.

Since that time he had often dreamt of such things, and often thought about them: but even when he thought he was laughing about them in a contemptuous way, many a time he would be conscious all the same that his contempt was not genuine, that his feeling of superiority was artificial! But: I won't touch any woman—ha! I won't let myself be led on!—he told himself. His diffidence and his shyness about his feelings held him back from asking anyone about all this business that was troubling his mind. It will pass—he thought.

He was standing now in the forest, facing the girl. Then he saw something—and suddenly his blood rushed so violently to his heart that he had to close his eyes for a moment so as not to feel giddy. His feeling of superiority was gone—the dream had disappeared—his calmness had left him. And all of this because of nothing at all: only her dress had been caught up a little, and he saw her leg, nothing more than her leg, almost up to her knee—a thick, sturdy leg.

He felt giddy—all his limbs seemed to grow loose, and his breath came heavily. What was it? What?—he asked himself, almost in a swoon.

With an effort he recovered control of himself.

"What—do you want—to ask me—Akulina?"—he blurted out. He was now quite pale, and there was desire in his eyes, though he was not conscious of it. She opened her mouth, involuntarily: her lips are moist—

Feodor saw—she smiled, and that smile in her staring, dreamy eyes told him the rest . . .

She said something, half closed her eyes, and although she made no movement, but still looked at him, her voice sounded—half-whispering—soft—compelling—as in a dream: her warm breath reached him with its strange fragrance:

". . . nothing, Fedia . . . !"

Then he rushed to her, clasped her shoulders, pulled her to him, pressed her soft breasts to him: and everything in him was throbbing and at the same time had lost all feeling. Like a mad person she bit his mouth: it bled. For one brief second, as if by a lightning-flash, he saw her face: it was pale, almost transparent. . . .

When it was all over, she got up quietly, put her clothes in order, and went off. In the middle of the night he woke up, in the forest—he had fallen asleep, he noted; he felt cold. He got up, remembered, stretched his limbs, laughed aloud and went home. They had not said a single word to each other.

They met next evening—without any arrangement—at the same spot in the forest, and once again they hardly spoke. This time he did not tremble, but smiled a somewhat superior smile, until he forgot it all again.

Then they had met each other frequently, in secret or openly; they never said a word about love, and never felt a moment's tenderness for each other. Later on, when Feodor began to pay attention to another girl, Praskovia, they met less often, and then left it off altogether. Moreover, Akulina went to Tula later on, and they said she had become a fine lady, or a street prostitute.

But Feodor went about in the village like a fine gentle-

man, proud and smiling. It was just this proud, superior smile that the girls could not bear; it irritated them: they felt they were being laughed at, and many of them protested that they would have their revenge—but they always yielded. Feodor never had a single unlucky love affair in the village; many folk said he never had one at all—though he possessed almost every girl. He still worked on the farm.

Meanwhile old Semiovski was fast going downhill, and Feodor had to work for the whole family, for the old man drank what he earned. For half a year there were only rainy days, and the villagers became even more spiritless: they did not even grumble any more, they said nothing—they got drunk: "Well, it's all right! To the devil with it! It's all right! Your health! There's nothing to be done!"

They scratched themselves, and drank, and philosophised about one thing and another—and each of them thought only of himself: a small, filthy, weary peasant or labourer; it rained, it kept on raining, every day.

Gloomy skies, gloomy faces, well then . . .

And the things they talked about in the inn:

The squire here . . . the squire there . . .

And the story of Semiovski.

"Volodia . . ."

"Yes . . . ?"

"I'm thinking something . . ."

"What's it, then? Devil take you! What are you thinking, then, Grischa?"

Crafty glances. A gurgle of liquor.

"You've probably got the same notion, you're a clever fellow, Volodia . . . hey . . . ?"

A pause.

One day the grocer let Anushka have it, with a piece of sausage:

"Ah, Anushka, my poor little pigeon, yes, but for the squire . . ."

"What then, little father?"

"Well, then, poor little Anna, then everything would have happened differently, and your father would have bought a husband for you . . ."

Anushka told her mother; she was lying ill.

Since that night when the house had been burnt down and Sofia Karlovna and the children had waited for her husband in front of the burnt-out logs, and he had come back drunk, degenerate and broken—since that night, she had become quite quiet and pale. She's diseased—they said in the village; she could not work any more, because her hands were always trembling and had no more strength in them: her eyes grew weak; she was often forced to sit down and take a rest.

"You must do something against it!" they told her. "You must look after yourself! Devil take it: you're still a sturdy woman! You mustn't let godfather Death beat you, Sofia!"

But she only listened to everything they said, smiled, and perhaps said "Yes!" and "That's probably right, but . . ." Then she would sit down somewhere, and fall asleep on the spot, and it would all be just the same.

She was glad when they left her in peace; she hadn't to care about anything, and lay on the stove, at first just for one hour a day, and then for another and yet another, and finally she didn't get up at all—and she had no need

to—she saw—for Anna, silently and as a matter of course, gradually took over her duties.

And so Sofia lay the whole day up above the stove; her fingers grew whiter and thinner, although she never washed them. Late in the evening her husband would come home, either quite drunk, and with a single breath filling the whole place with his smell of liquor, and making a noise and shouting—or, when he had not got hold of any drink, wavering between shame and helplessness, humble and quiet, hardly daring to raise his eyes. The children were afraid of him when he was drunk—and so they humiliated him all the more when once in a way he came home sober.

"Hey, you!" Feodor would say, for example—"get down from the bench: lie on the earth if you like! The bench is for the man who feeds his family . . ."

"I . . ."—the old man would try to explain something, to make some answer, but Feodor just picked him up like a bundle and moved him from the bench to the ground.

"Mother of God!" his father would say, quite startled—"and that's my child!"

He prayed in a low voice and grumbled on to the Mother of God, till Feodor shouted to him from the bench:

"Shut your mouth! I want to sleep . . . !"

The old man was quiet.

The boy's mother was lying peacefully up above the stove. She was not asleep; she listened to it all.

It was night: she heard the regular breathing of the other three; she herself hardly ever slept.

As she lay there, thinking, listening, she heard the faintest rustlings, and they turned into loud voices: every-

thing was confused in a bright medley: dreams and the rustling of the trees—night, and the distant horizon . . .

Outside there, the tree-tops were rustling; perhaps there was yellow moonlight on the leaves, so that they looked painted. The rustling was like a spring. Her eyes closed, and she began to hum softly to herself an air that came into her mind:

"A lime tree stands
At the gate by the stream—
In its shade I have dreamt,
Ah, so many a dream!"

"A beautiful song—a beautiful melody! . . . there are so many lime-trees: I believe there are only limes, nothing but limes . . . in front of the house, the great, old limes . . . but it's autumn, and the leaves have all come down in the wind—how cold it is!—through the branches you can see the other side of the street."

"Johann Christlieb Wagener—Cabinet Maker."

. . . the guests are standing by the work-bench—they're singing—mother comes and says—what's that she says?—you can hardly catch it, she's speaking so softly—"Don't be going to the window all the time, Sofie dear! What will the people think!"

Mother has her brown dress on. Round her neck there's a white lace collar—it was always white . . .

"You look like a senator!" father said to mother about her dress: they kissed each other's mouths. Because it was mother's birthday. The first day of Christmas.

. . . down yonder the ice is smooth, the lads are sliding —how red their cheeks are! And fur caps over their ears. In the evening we sing: "Holy night, in silence deep . . ."

Then I go to bed—a little child's cot with white bars, and over it an angel made of pasteboard, resting its chin on its hand. Papa comes: ". . . night, little Sofie!"—gives me a kiss—how his beard tickles!

She tittered like a silly little girl.

". . . when I was quite tiny, I took hold of it—my whole hands were full of hair, and father pretended he was terribly angry—but he wasn't really angry in the least—and Mama laughed. She was always laughing, always singing. The windows were so large and bright that the whole room was full of sun—especially now in the early part of the year, on Sunday mornings.

"Now we're going to church; Mama is holding my hand; I'm a big girl, I say, and want to walk by myself. I've a great blue bow in my hair. I've often held that bow in my hand—blue silk, blue taffeta, blue as—yes, as the sea, as the Baltic—clear blue, when the sun shines on it, and it's glittering.

". . . going out on an excursion with the school, to the Baltic, bright blue when the sun shines on it. It's cool in the evening; we come back—we run in step along the alleys and the streets—the moon is shining; the streets are lying there as still as an old church. Pastor Worms walks ahead of us—his steps resound through the streets—otherwise we'd be afraid, just little children, from the excursion, with bows . . .

'Oh, dearest reverend sire,
A kiss is my desire,
And if I don't get it,
My whole life I'll regret it!'

—that's what we sang, but to ourselves. In church it was

cool and solitary. The Mother of God was always smiling: '. . . we know each other, little Sofie, don't we?'—when I had measles I was always imagining that to myself: now I'm sure of it. Papa had no money for the doctor: he took his watch to the pawn-shop, he told Mama . . .

". . . Mama asked Papa—'What time is it?' He looked out of the open window—his beard moved, and he said: 'I can't see it from here!' God, how we laughed over it!

". . . I got well again, but we couldn't manage to get the watch out of pawn. But I made up my mind I'd get it back for Papa: I'd just marry someone, who'd get out the watch . . . marry . . . ?"

She shuddered and huddled up, and opened her eyes and looked round:

In Russia this is a house! Oh, how cold and empty it is! Yes, that's my husband, the man I married—that man there with the degenerate face, that man sleeping on the ground. . . .

"I shall die"—she suddenly felt, and her heart grew terribly heavy and full of fear—"in this cold, strange land —I shall die—at night, when everyone's sleeping, that's when I shall die . . ."

Next morning—Feodor was away in the forest for a few days—Anushka came home from the grocer's in a great state of excitement, and repeated what he had told her—just to herself, in a low, excited voice; for many weeks her mother had not listened when she said anything.

But then something happened: her mother got up from her bed.

"What's that you say, Anna? Say that again!"

And Anna reported word for word the conversation she had had with the grocer.

Then a change came about in Sofia Karlovna. For a long time she had been living in the past—home-sickness had been consuming her. Now she felt that she was suddenly snatched back into the present, and everything came back to her mind again. Tremendous ideas came into her head—thoughts . . .

". . . if that is true . . . if that is true . . ."

"If what is true?" Anna asked, startled by her mother's sudden interest.

". . . nothing, nothing!" she said in her dry voice, and lay down again.

The darkness was being lighted. "Yes, that's how it is! It must be so! That's it! Nothing else was ever possible!" One suspicion after another came into her head, like link after link in a chain, and there was one scorching name throughout the chain—

The squire is to blame for it all!

Once again she saw him in front of her: his teeth, his breath, the pupils of his eyes. She groaned, for her body grew limp—she groaned without stopping, until she lost consciousness. Then she woke up at once, and now her blood was cool—she closed her tired, half-blind eyes, the corners of her mouth drew downwards, her body stiffened —she was thinking:

"That man!"

Just that continuous, wild, rabid thought:

"That man! That man! That man!"

Saliva ran down her chin—she felt giddy—she wanted to stop thinking about it, but now she could not stop—she

must—she must . . .

And gradually everything joined in to swell her hatred: regret for the life that was no longer hers, the horror of having to die in these strange surroundings—everything—her face grew distorted. She was like a child that has been crying and is struck by someone: all her sorrows are piled up in this new pain—a thousand wrongs and sufferings come into her mind, and increase her sorrow, till she is completely exhausted.

She had lost all vestige of colour: but she was waiting impatiently for her husband—at last he came, drunk, brutal and savage.

She started up, leaned over from above the stove and screamed at him like an old cat:

"Nikolai . . . !"

He came nearer to her, with tottering steps.

"Here"—she threw her savings at him—"is money: bring liquor! Lots of it! Not kvass, mind you! Vodka! And bring them all with you—from the inn, and anyone you meet—it's important, you understand?—if you can understand anything, you stupid, empty peasant-pate!"—she screamed—"Do you understand?—your life's at stake!"

He stared at her with red, glassy eyes: he could not understand a word.

"Schnaps!" she screamed, and struck down from the stove towards his head. Then he reeled out.

The men in the inn thought it over:

"Well, we probably ought to," they said, "we all owe something to Semiovski: so we'll do what he asks us!"

"Yes, yes, we'll come!" they said to Semiovski, who was still drunk.

They went to his place—the place where he now lived,

on the farm, in a hut without a stable, with no storeroom, no cattle.

Sofia Karlovna could hardly wait till they came. Her eyes were glowing in her leaden-coloured face: she was tossing from side to side on her bed, murmuring incomprehensible words.

At last they came: first Nikolai, then the grocer, the peasants Gregori, Vladimir, Piotr, some of the women—there was hardly room for them in the cramped hut. Someone had brought an oil lamp, to make it a little brighter: but in the corners it was still dark and filled with restless shadows. The men had come from the inn; they had been drinking—the smell of liquor filled the room. After a while no one noticed it. Nikolai had become sober: his face was terrible—the peasants, quiet, sturdy people, looked at him: how small he was, how broken!

"Well, Semiovski . . ."—one of them said after a pause.

She jumped up: it was only then that the peasants saw her and her colourless face, and they were startled. Out of the darkness loomed cheeks so hollow that they looked like dark holes, eyes as deep as black pits—a small, shrivelled face, but with a high, haggard forehead, pale as death, unearthly; such was the face that loomed out of the semi-darkness between the light and the shadows.

"Schnaps!"—she said. She drank from the bottle—the black pits of her eyes filled up—her eyes stood out—they all stared at her—like gleaming, glowing, drunken balls in her face; they seemed to blot out her nose, her forehead, her mouth, her whole face—she looks exactly like a burning sea, Piotr thought.

"You!" she suddenly burst out, pointing at Piotr. He

cowered down. She pointed to one after another of them: ". . . you! . . . and you!"

She stopped: the men looked at each other in confusion: her glance flashed across towards her husband.

"Nikolai!"

He jumped, woke up, terrified, and stared at her.

"Nikolai," she said slowly—emphasising every word, and looking him fixedly in the eyes—"Nikolai, to-day I've learnt something; the grocer let Anna have it with a piece of sausage:

"The squire's to blame for everything!"

Those eyes!—Nikolai thought; he felt nothing but that his brain was muddled, and that everything was confused in the stare of those fixed, glowing eyes of his wife, from which there was no escape. She stared at him:

My God—he thought, and felt that he would rather be dead—what have I done?

Then she began to speak. It was a relief to him: he had stopped thinking, and was conscious only of those gleaming, immense black orbs. And she spoke, and he greedily drank in every word: he knew it was something terrible that he was going to hear: he was completely absorbed in what she was saying.

She went on speaking.

Scarcely audible, scorching, mysterious words—every word like a great decision. It was a little, dark hut, in the night, in the vast fields of Russia. It was time for sleep, and the men pressed close together and in the warmth and darkness began to dream terrible dreams. That was a dream—that horrible, hoarse, toneless voice which never ceased . . .

". . . think of *him:* how did he come? What is he?—

A man like you, Piotr, a fellow like you, Gregori—a man, and nothing more than you, Volodia—a peasant, such as you all are, a weak-willed man! And you're afraid? You stand there, and his shadow is bigger than you are: he stands in darkness and you stand in light: but you, you fear the darkness, and he *laughs* at you—ha, ha, ha, he laughs—because you can't see it: and he lashes you with his whip—hey! hey!—in your faces—always in your faces . . . !"

The peasants started violently; they put their hands up to their necks, their faces . . . will that voice never stop? . . . Never? . . .

". . . he inherited the land and the farm from his father: very well, and what then? All his people died, and he was left alone, and he soaked, and his shoulders became round, his hands like sausages—his legs like tree-trunks! . . . You've always been afraid of him, and more afraid every day—he's seen it, and he's come with his whip and said: 'Lie down!' and you've lain down, devil take you! He stands in front of the sun and shuts out the sun, and you off with your caps and say: 'God bless you, little father, God bless you . . . .'"

The peasants were breathing heavily; they were cowering in their corner, huddled close to each other and staring with heavy eyes into the darkness of the stove, from which the voice came, contemptuous, inciting, shrill . . .

". . . Oh, it's *poor* men you are . . . yes! *He* has power—what can we do, you say, what? *He* is powerful! And *he* has a face like a swirling flood—two arms like a sea monster that seizes everything in its grasp—*he* has a flashing whip and—devil take it!—he has a *straight* back—and we, we have rounded humps, and we covet the

land that belongs to him . . ."

The voice broke—it became weak and fierce—a shudder ran down their spines—and now the voice was again clear and toneless:

". . . yes, yes, we are poor people, very poor people! He trampled down our gardens: and what was that business, Volodia, with your wife? He met her in the forest, hey? What did she say, Volodia, hey?—when she came back? Was she crying, was she miserable? Or did her eyes gleam and glitter and did she talk in a dreamy voice about his teeth, his arms, his legs, hey?"

A pause. The men were breathing heavily—their heads were burning—their mouths were open—their teeth shone—they were staring across towards the voice—Volodia lost all control, and screamed:

"Yes, I hear you, go on . . ."

". . . I will say what everyone knows—*everyone*, except—Nikolai doesn't know: Nikolai, you! for you're one of those weak-willed creatures that chucks away his money and his brains on drink! Why is it you're such a bundle of suffering! . . . Just look at him! You all know it! Why don't you say it? You pack of cowards, you low curs! Someone robbed us of our cow—a cow like a sister—a little calf with round eyes! All our hens, which used to eat out of our hands, were burnt up!—they cried out and were burnt up, and we didn't hear them . . . Someone robbed us of our home—our stove—our room. Why? What had we done? What was it we'd done? . . . Someone robbed us of one thing after another . . . someone robbed us of everything we had—someone: and who was it? Nikolai, who? Do you hear?—Who? Tell him then, you——

"The squire!"

She screamed it out with such intensity that her voice broke, and they all screamed it at the same time—then she fell back—a stream of blood flowed down over her neck and her body—no one took any notice of it.

Nikolai had jumped up; vodka and blood were streaming from his mouth, from his eyes; the men were screaming senseless words to each other; in his brain thoughts, proofs, were ranging themselves—incessant, compelling, like a flaming screed of lightning: the terrible torment of his ruin suddenly broke over him like a sea—he was drowning, with a horrible scream:

"Ah—ah—ah—ah—!"—he beat against the door till it broke open and the cold air came in—he rushed out, screaming . . .

The men stood as if frozen. It was a woman who came to her senses first.

"Hold him, run after him! He'll do himself some injury!" she shouted.

Then the men came to their senses, and ran after him, but when they reached the gate of the manor-house, they could see, behind the yellow curtains, the shadows already fighting . . .

They stood in front of the gate and waited—peasants, women, labourers—then Nikolai was brought out—Vassilii and Sossia were carrying him—he was unconscious, with broad, bloody streaks in his colourless, sunken face, but he was not dead—and later the squire said it had been a case of self-defence. They carried him to the nearest hut, to Piotr's, and then they laid him down, and Anushka put wet towels over his forehead—"he's my father!"—she thought; she felt no sorrow for him.

Feodor had come home and found his mother: she was hardly breathing now. It was twilight: he could not see her clearly and did not see the blood, but as he bent down over her, her pale forehead shone out of the darkness—and then suddenly and for the first time, he realised that this was his mother, that he loved her, that she was dying: her eyes were fading . . .

"Mother!"—he screamed, and pressed his head against her hands; then her dark eyelids opened, and her eyes smiled at him.

The feeling of what a mother was pierced him like a deep stab to his heart. This was the only human being in that hard, relentless life—he felt—who would weep over me—who would die for me—who loves me with all she is and has: her hands, her heart, her body that once bore me, her tears that she has shed for me, her cries that she has cried for me . . .

Humbled, deeply moved, he felt with surprise that here there would always have been rest—here—here there would always have been trust!

Pale, wan mother . . . ! "How I love her!"

He said it several times in a low voice, through his tears —then she raised her hand a little, and his head sank down against her: she felt his warm tears—she knew it all—she felt all that he was feeling—she smiled, and said —whispered:

". . . in Stettin"—she said—"on Sunday morning all the bells ring—Fedia, my little one—you wild lad, you, my Fedia . . ."—and she drowsily stroked his head.

A deep stillness; time was walking softly up and down the room, with a grave face; no one heard it, no one

spoke, no one breathed.

She gave a sudden start:

"Fedia!"—she whispered, hurriedly, eagerly—"I must tell you one more thing—I mustn't forget it whatever happens . . ."—and she tried to speak, to tell him something; she was gasping for breath. Then the door was flung open, the cold air rushed in, and a peasant screamed:

"Feodor, for the Saviour's sake—come! He's half-killed him!"

He slammed the door.

Darkness. Stillness.

"Who's half-killed whom?"—Feodor asked his mother in an excited voice. The beautiful moments of peace had gone; his mother was in a fever, and suddenly grew very agitated.

"Go, Fedia! Go! See what it is and come right back and tell me what you've seen—do you hear . . . ?"

"No, I'll stay here with you, mother . . ."

"No! Go, darling!" she whispered. "I'll wait till . . ."

As she was so insistent, he went out, with hesitating steps, and looking back more than once.

The door closed, and she was alone. She stretched out her thin arms; here there was peace—"how nice!"—she thought—"stillness and night, as soft as a pillow . . . !"

She settled down again, smiling—"my darling!"—she whispered—"in Stettin all the bells are ringing."

She smiled and listened, but she could hear only the wind and the night; she listened, and answered—the pictures moving in front of her closed eyes were all confused—suddenly she laughed out loud, slowly raised herself up and got down from the stove on to the ground.

". . . all the bells"—she whispered, coughing—"that's

why he's been half-killed!"

After a pause—she looked round the room—helplessly and in tears she whispered:

"Fedia, where have you gone? Fedushka, you must protect him, do you hear . . . ?"

She felt all round with outstretched hands; she looked as if she were a blind person. Her arms, long, thin, ghost-like white bones, stuck out from her shift.

Suddenly she started back in alarm: in front of her clamouring, fevered brain, a thought had passed. She screwed up her forehead, trying to recall the thought; she struggled convulsively to get it back—there—she had it; her face slowly relaxed, and she understood:

". . . someone's half-killed him . . ."

Him? Whom?

The squire!

Suddenly she saw herself as in a mirror:

". . . I sat there and egged on the peasants, filled them up with schnaps and ideas, incited them—yes, it's true! But why . . . ? Why did I? . . ."

She laughed, and the next moment tears came: for now she realised that she had meant something altogether different from what she had said. She had spoken of the squire, and had used words against him which had intoxicated her like schnaps.

"Yes, yes: the thought of him is *intoxicating,* and my hatred is actually only longing and desire and love—nothing but that—the squire, Ivan Kirillovich—he, the man who embraced me—the man towards whom I stretched forward my neck, my breasts—the man who took hold of me, and however madly I defended myself—he laughed! How he reeked of drink, of sweat, of a

man! . . . Someone's half-killed him, and I *love* him, I love him, yes, I love him unspeakably . . . !"

". . . now I've nothing more to lose," she thought, "for I'm dying: there's no need for me now to tell lies to anyone, and the Holy Virgin knows it, anyhow, what I've just come to realise!—that the only happy moment of my life was with him, with him, only with him! They've half-killed him, because of me. For my sake. *Now* he'll feel me, *my* claws, *my* teeth . . ."

She stretched out her arms in the darkness:

". . . now I'll go across to him; he'll lie heavy and cold in my arms; he can't defend himself: he'll lie in my arms—I'll feel it . . ."

She stood upright, just as she was, in her long shift, with no shoes on her feet, and went out of the door, groping along, breathing in with delight the smell of the wind from the fields. She felt neither the cold nor the night nor the darkness: she strode on with naked, outstretched arms; a feeling of happiness such as she had never known filled her soul to tears. She had almost lost consciousness . . .

Now she had reached the courtyard: there everything was still and empty—no one met her. As if in a dream, she went round the house to the back, opened a door, took a step forward, opened another door:

There he was, seated in a chair! She saw his back, bent forward. The dream was over.

He was sitting at the table, in front of his blue book, and his back was towards her. His head was resting on his hands: he had not heard her. It was dark—the small oil-lamp had almost burned itself out. He has been writing—she thought, and she looked greedily at his hard,

strong back; what his back must be like when it's naked —she thought—and then he suddenly sprang up, stared at her, and fell back—fell back against the wall as if in horror, and screamed in a high-pitched voice:

". . . it's there again . . . !"

He stared at the shift-clad figure, pale as a corpse, and was sure that it was a ghost . . .

"Now at last I've got you!"—he screamed.

He was still excited as the result of Semiovski's attack, still half in a fever; the rage of the fight was still throbbing in his clenched fists.

Semiovski was now lying down there in Piotr's house—it was self-defence, the squire thought to himself: a fight carries one away so, one forgets all order and self-control, one gets mad so easily . . . what chance had that little peasant, Semiovski, with his emaciated fists, the fists of a drunkard!

He was lying now on a bench; he had been vomiting; his little fox-like face was swollen and black.

"He's dying"—the peasants were saying; the women were praying with their lips—one suggested fetching the priest from the next village, but afterwards they forgot about it.

Now it's all up with us, the peasants thought: there's no one left to give us help or hope.

"We'll go on working for years as we've worked for years past—morning and noon and night. There's nothing left for us but birth and women and liquor and death . . ."

Semiovski lay there, groaning with pain. Feodor was sitting by him, holding his hand.

"How I love him!"—he thought—"How I love him!"

He cried; his cheeks were moist, and the tears fell on his hands; an immense wave of tenderness for his parents swept over him: for those little, broken, miserable beings . . .

". . . after all, he's my father!"

With a clearness that hurt him he remembered the times when he had cursed and tormented him: each separate occasion came into his mind—"forgive me!" he whispered softly; then, as no answer came, a great compassion for his father, who was so pale and tired that he could not speak, overwhelmed him, and he flung himself down in front of him, forgot all shame and cried:

"Forgive me! Forgive me!"

They all wept.

At midnight the old man died.

It was after his wife's death that life first grew heavy and monotonous to Ivan Kirillovich, the landowner. He was conscious of the unhappiness and sorrow that he brought on all sides, and this oppressed him, for he was not a bad man; on the contrary, he was fundamentally shy, credulous and benevolent. But independence did not suit him, for—after his wife died and he took over the management of the property—he would have liked best to go down to the village, evening after evening, with his pipe and a little kvass, and talk and gossip and laugh. But it wasn't right for him to do that: he had to stay up there in his lonely room and talk to himself—for the peasants, he knew, were children, and had to be driven, or else they could never be moved at all. If he were to laugh with them to-day, they would be clapping him on the back to-morrow, and the day after they would be laughing *at* him. Besides, for a time he enjoyed being

squire: to be hard! A fine game! In his own uncertainty of mind it was intoxicating to oppress others.

When, not long after the death of his parents, his wife had died, he breathed more freely, for they had kept him well in hand—first his mother, then his wife (they knew him)—and at first timidly, later with some pleasure, he would remember: "she is no longer about!"—and he looked more closely at the girls—hugged them, first timidly, and then when he saw that none of them offered any resistance, more boldly—and brought along the first one, and soon the second. He lay in their arms, rejoicing in his freedom, tried to get and to give loving caresses—a young, helpless human being. The stout maidens smiled in a motherly way at his tender words, and soon began to laugh at him in their good-humoured way. In secret he would weep at the way they treated him; and then he made a decision.

With beating heart, and with his eyes shut, he began to strike the girls for no reason at all—and then they no longer laughed at him, they fawned on him—and he saw: that's how they like to be treated! He screamed at his servants, first half-heartedly, then more and more as a matter of course, and they thought it quite in order.

The peasants said earnestly to each other:

". . . he's no longer a lad, the master, he's grown into a squire," and they doffed their caps. But he crouched in his room in the long summer evenings—the next village was much too far away for him to get there and back in an evening—he sat there, and looked down into the village, where the young girls were dancing in bright kerchiefs. Their faces were glowing, and the lads' voices were deep as they cried—"Hey! Hey!"—to the rhythm of

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the passionate music. In the long summer evenings . . .

In the course of years the squire had become a really lonely man, a hard, helpless human being. He felt that his skin did not fit him, and he grew all the more unhappy through trying to shift his unhappiness on to others —he became a peculiar person—a man with dark ideas, often savage beyond all bounds. "I am the master!" he would often cry, though no one disputed it—"I am the master!"

He had "discovered" the peaceful charm of vodka, and another evening a new lust in women. He had sent for them and taken them for himself whenever he found them. But all the women he sent for gave themselves to him—none of them gave him the deeper enjoyment of having to fight for them—it had been a bitter disillusionment to him, and also that the men just smiled about his love affairs and said nothing.

". . . there's no such thing as Right; no such thing as Goodness; no such thing as Faith . . ."

Sometimes his feeling of the injustice in the world overwhelmed him, like a swoon: he could not stand up against it—it carried him irresistibly forward. He put temptations in its way: he became furtively pitiless, unjust and mean—he could do nothing to save himself: he became a cruel beast, in order to test how unjust the world could be. But there was not a single occasion on which he did not win: he lost his faith, took to drink, dulled his conscience.

One must just drink and forget everything good—and do what one wants to—he thought. It's a grand thing to be unrestrained, to rush through the forest at night and ride so wildly that the wind slaps you in the

face—he thought. Everything that's good must be forgotten . . .

And finally he realised: he had been entirely thrown back on himself; he must look after himself if he wanted to have his share in the joy of life. And then he seized blindly everything that came his way. He did not see that his discontent, the emptiness of his days and evenings, the joyless anger, might be his punishment . . .

The terrible thing about his new mode of life was that, after quite a brief period of unrestrained enjoyment, every savage act which he thought would increase his happiness —and he believed that it was only through brutal acts which made others suffer that he would get happiness— was turned into gall by his conscience. And one day he reached the tremendous conclusion, which became more and more a shadow over his life:

"There is only a certain measure of happiness in the world, which never gets larger or smaller; the measure is not great—oh no, it is much, much too little, and the man who realises exactly how limited it is falls into a state of perpetual melancholy from which the only escape is death!"

And from this there followed the second conclusion: "If a man wants happiness, he must rob it from someone else!"

He told himself:

"I want happiness, and I am determined to take it from someone: but I do not want to know who it is that I take it from; I will shut my eyes and snatch this happiness from somewhere or other: I do not want to know who had it before me and who is now without happiness. *I* want happiness, a great deal of happiness, my fill of it;

that's what I want. . ."

He had a tender conscience, the squire. Everyone who wants happiness has a tender conscience, and it's the great fat giants who have the most tender souls. The squire had an incredibly tender conscience, and his hands, which did evil things, would be shaking when they should have been grasping firmly. He would often hold his hands up in the air:

Yes, they are trembling! That's my tender conscience! Then a man must drink—there's nothing else for it, that's the only thing . . . !

And at that period the girl, Nadiejda, had come to him—almost an old maid: she had six fingers, for on one hand she had only a single finger—a deformity from birth. She had never found a husband—people would not let her get near tiny children—and they laughed at her. She was a poor unfortunate—fate had been very, very unfair to her—this little woman with the delicate skin. He had never interfered with her, and one day she came of herself—just as she was: compliant and tender—with drooping shoulders: so attractive!—When she had been in bed a long time and everything was over and she was sleeping, he was still awake, looking at her, breathing gently: she was lying in his arms. He did not sleep at all the whole night—tears came into his eyes, to see her lying like that—he was happy.

But she always went away again and left him alone. If she had never come, he would never have known what it was to have peaceful nights filled with trust and happiness—but she came only now and then, and every time she left him for a long while, alone in his suffering. Her coming showed him how horrible the evenings were with-

out her—it was she who first made him realise his uncertainty, his loneliness, his suffering. And gradually, at first unconsciously and then more and more clearly, his hatred of her developed. In the evenings he would be afraid of her coming and at the same time long for her to come: he lived now only in fear or in longing, and his life consisted only of intervals between her comings—intervals which had to be filled up with ridiculous, absorbing things: drinking, crying . . .

His hands trembled . . .

He was frequently delirious: there was someone in the room, he believed—a nun, or a monk with a long white beard. And they spoke to him, insistently:

"Be good, Ivan! Please, be good!"

Or when only the nun was there, she would glide quickly past him—so quickly, that he had constantly to be turning his head from side to side; and then she passed so quickly that he was quite unable to keep pace with her, however wildly he moved his head round, and he grew quite dizzy. The nun had a stern face, he knew—often she leaned over and whispered scornfully:

"How are you going to face God, Ivan?"

But the monk was much worse, for he was quite still—and Ivan struck out and drank himself fuddled, but the monk did not go away.

"Vassilii!" he would shout at last, in despair. Vassilii came.

"Shut the windows!"

Vassilii shut the windows; he lighted the oil-lamp.

. . . but its glow did not reach very far: it did not reach into all the corners. In one of the corners there was definitely someone—not the nun, and also not the monk

—no—someone quite different, someone he did not know, was standing in the dark corner and looking at his back, ah . . .

He rushed out, down the steps, into the village, to Nadiejda Sergeievna.

He broke into the quiet house, and now he was standing in front of her stove. It was quite dark and still: "You ought to be my wife: just come . . . !"

Out of the darkness she said that she would come next day . . . and now she was there—and now he suddenly realised to whom he owed all the suffering of his life—he would tell her, he would do something—perhaps die . . . pray—something great, holy . . . and then she struck him in the face.

Then all sorts of things happened—this, and that, and something else—his hands did not tremble—his tender conscience was no longer tender . . .

Nadiejda cast out, thrown away—the village humbled and the curs brought to heel—he had stamped on their skulls—ha, that made him feel better! That agitator Semiovski converted into a drunken weakling—he's now a labourer—that's a good thing:

"I am the master!"

Were his hands trembling?—Nonsense! His hands were absolutely steady when he held them up!

That's a good thing, very good . . .

When all that had happened and he was at last the victor, he should have been able at least to get a little rest—but then he collapsed: alcoholic poisoning, nervous fever. But that doesn't hurt a "squire," even if he has blasphemed the Madonna: the Madonna was kind, the Madonna would forgive—Holy Mother of Kazan! She

knew he had been drunk. All was forgotten: now he was alive again . . .

A quiet, exhausted life.

He recovered slowly; he began to worry again about being good—everything was in a great state of neglect. He created order here, and decency there—the people respected him more than they had ever done before, and he never touched alcohol—not a drop of vodka, by the Mother of God—only now and then, practically only as medicine, when the evenings were so dark and long. But in spite of it all . . .

He suddenly became an old man—read the Bible—wept long and often—spoke to no one—locked his door at night with a key ordered from Odoievsk—and no one knew what he did in there. Most frequently he was looking at his hands.

It was a dark winter's night. The wind was drifting gently across towards the south-west, sighing in the fields; the animals were restless, and the human beings were making life burdensome to themselves.

The suffering in the world was immense . . .

At that moment old Semiovski died.

The squire was sitting in his room, everything was quiet—suddenly he felt someone's gaze piercing his back; he jumped up, pressed his back against the wall, and stared at the apparition.

There at last the apparition had taken flesh—flesh?—white bones in a long shift—a pallid forehead without eyes—hands stretched out towards him:

This was no dream! This was reality!

He looked more closely at her, his brows knit angrily, and he came a pace nearer, his shoulders bent forward—

"now I have you!"—he shouted, and flung himself towards her. Then the lamp—it must have been jolted by his movement—flickered up, and he recognised her face.

". . . Sofia Karlovna . . . ?"—(from force of habit he used her father's name)—he shrank back . . . "you . . . ?"

"Yes," she thought, "what have I come for?"

She suddenly felt cold—her naked feet trembled violently: she thought she could feel her hair turning white.

". . . shall I tell him that the peasants are thinking of killing him? . . . shall I ask him why he has ruined us all? . . . shall I ask him why . . ."

The squire had sat down again, and turned the lamp up a little; now he could see her quite clearly. He gave himself time, and—as she said nothing—he grew calm and dreamy. Suddenly he woke up with a start, and began to speak.

"Yes," he said, as if he had been considering precisely this question all the time—"Sofia, you also are to blame for everything!"

The events of the last few years ranged themselves before his mind. He thought that he understood it all: and he did understand it all. Semiovski had not been blackmailing him. That had been a terrible misunderstanding. Who was to blame? He nodded his head.

"Yes, that's just how it is: you also are to blame for everything!"

"Every human being is to blame for all unhappiness"—he said bitterly.

"What?"—she tried to cry out, to ask him—but she did not cry out and did not question him, for his sombre peacefulness made her feel happy—what's the use of talk-

ing? It's of absolutely no importance to say things! . . .

She looked at him. It's probably true, if he says it—she thought—I don't want to think about it! She looked into his wide, dark face—and growing paler, she breathed in the smell of him—the smell of vodka, tobacco and sweat.

". . . to blame for everything," he repeated.

The greatest things that happen to a human soul are sudden, noiseless, sharp, hard: a person wills one thing and does another; or one hides oneself in a fog as if behind a mother's dress, the fog suddenly clears and one is left standing there, clear and cold and sharply lighted up—and everybody can see one's face before it can be changed to its everyday expression.

She felt comfort and relief, as if she had just given birth to a child: the pain was over, and she was no longer suffering. She saw the light of heaven . . .

". . . don't you know, then, little father"—she said in a low voice, gently and simply—"that I have never done anything but think of you and love you?"

Then she was silent: and there was nothing more to be said. The lamp flickered; everything was still, and the air was like milk and unguent: it smelt of Christmas. It's all right: a little dream, she was thinking. I am not tired—I'm smiling now!

So she turned round, meek, bowed down and a little heavy at heart, like an old maid by a Christmas tree—and she walked slowly to the door and out. She walked with short steps, smiling, through the courtyard, towards the dark trees, out on to the street.

He, left there in his room, kept on thinking: if I had known that! If only I had known that! . . .

She went on—from time to time she felt faint, and sometimes she had to cough heavily and spit out the blood on to the ground. But she walked on and on; according to the laws of science she should have been dead: but it is only in medical works that these laws hold good—in real life one can die almost when one wants to. She did not die, because she had forgotten about death, and was happy. She did not notice that her feet were bleeding—she had stumbled against hard stones or broken pots—nor did she notice the cold, the night, and the beautiful stillness hanging over the trees—none of it.

She wandered on like that, dreamily, through the village; she reached the great cross, and as it was in the middle of the road she struck blindly and heavily against it; the blow hurt her, and she cried out. The pain was only momentary, but she fell down without a sound.

She woke up. The dream was over. She was in great pain, and she was so cold that her teeth were knocking against one another. With an effort she lifted one hand and stuck a finger between her teeth, for the chattering hurt her and alarmed her unbearably. She was lying against the wooden stem of the crucifix—she felt the hard wood: it was not cold. Under her were thin grass and earth. Her shift was bright: it made a little white spot in the night. She lay quite still; only now and then she tried to cry out, a little, thin cry. Then she listened.

Everything remained quiet.

". . . to die here"—she wailed softly—"in a cold road, in the night, alone like this . . . !"

"Fedia!' she cried in a thin, shrill tone; but her voice broke in blood and tears—ah, I am an unfortunate woman, she thought—but Fedia *must* come—he *must*

come, there's something more I've got to tell him. It was impossible—she tried to assure herself—that the Lord Jesus would not let her have at least that: I can't die here, just like this: I don't believe it's possible! No, I just don't believe it's possible! . . . After all, he's my child!

She coughed and struggled for breath. Then she lay quite still.

She did not think of Anna, or of her husband: and what she was thinking then was almost not a thought at all: it was like smoke, dispersing, vanishing into clouds —little clouds—that was how everything that was so hard to say in words floated past her dying soul—whispered, like a dim picture:

". . . . to stroke his head . . . to tell him . . . to explain all this misfortune to him . . . the squire . . . kisses . . . to stroke his head . . . my boy . . ."

She lay there, helpless; she could not cry out any more —a tiny, bloody, bright speck in that dark, immense Russian night . . .

Feodor was sitting in old Piotr's house: there was no light burning except for the one under the ikon in the corner. The bench under the light in peasants' huts was called the bench of the dead; there the dead lay until they were buried—old, hard peasants, and tiny mites who had not been able to survive their birth, and everyone who died—everyone. When there was no corpse in the house the children often slept there and had dark dreams under the statue of Mary.

There Nikolai Petrovich Semiovski was now lying. His little, pointed face had an expression of tension, as if he were listening to something interesting: his eyebrows

were drawn up, so that deep furrows lined his forehead; his chin was a little pushed forward, but his eyes were closed. The right side of his neck was dark, almost black. He was lying there, motionless, but terribly intent on something or other.

Feodor sat by him, alone, watching him tenderly and anxiously. All his feelings were drawing him towards this inquisitive corpse, this silent old man; a great longing in his heart grew more and more painful, until he felt quite weak and helpless: tears rushed out of his eyes, and he sobbed bitterly, till his head fell on his breast, and down on to the hands of the dead man. He sobbed more and more violently: he could hardly breathe for sorrow and tears—the emptiness and yearning of his youth rose in him—he remembered each little sorrow—grief gripped him like a giant, and tore at all the raw places of his soul.

The others had long since left the room.

Feodor was still kneeling in front of the bench on which his father lay; he had grown calmer; he was weeping softly, his shoulders jerking convulsively—he stayed like that: the minutes passed.

His mother was waiting.

His shoulders were not heaving now—the soft weeping had died away—the warmth of the room, the stillness, the great, bitter, lonely grief; they overwhelmed him, and gradually he fell asleep . . .

The stove was hissing. Slowly, mysteriously, the furrows in the dead man's forehead flattened out and disappeared, and his chin sank, while Feodor slept. The dead man lost his keen, inquisitive expression, as if he had got bored, and he looked as if he were trying to speak

—as if some ghost had moved him. Then the eyebrows fell, and the inquisitive face was no longer inquisitive, but a small, old, fox-like face with a drooping, helpless chin. Feodor slept on . . .

. . . My God, a footstep! A footstep coming through the night, approaching her. She heard it. She forced her eyes open: it was all gone—the warmth, the brimming light of a thousand candles, the music! Here was the dark road, the night . . . He is coming!—she thought. She tried to rise—it seemed an eternity before she could manage to raise her head even a few inches.

"Ah. . . !"

The footsteps were drawing nearer, hurrying—there, there he is . . .

It was—Vassilii, the squire's servant. He was coming from the farm, where Sossia, his betrothed, was working now. He had crept off secretly to her, without permission. Then a peasant had come running with the news of Semiovski's attack on the squire.

"Mother of God!"—Vassilii cried, and flung Sossia into the corner—"and I wasn't there! He'll kill me!"

And while he was running through the forest and along the road he was anxiously considering what he could possibly say about where he had been—and then, still running, he reached the crucifix. From some way off he had seen its dark form—the heavy timber looming up towards the overhanging sky. He heard it moan—jumped back, stood still and crossed himself. One fear had disappeared before another greater fear. He was trembling: his cap dropped down over his eyes.

When he finally realised who it was lying there—the peasant woman Sofia—he wavered: what should he do?

He wanted very much to help her, but with his master raging . . .

"I can't help you now, Sofia," he said hurriedly, and filled with genuine distress and sympathy—"the squire is in a state, and he'll kill me! But I'll send help to you from the nearest house. However did you get here? Holy Mother of God!"

She said something, but he could not understand it. Brimming over with impatience and hurry, his thoughts already far ahead, he bent down closer to her mouth.

"The . . . great . . . secret . . ." she moaned. She told it, and fell back.

Vassilii, relieved at being able to go, jumped up and ran as fast as he could to the manor-house. On the way he saw a light in Piotr's house, burst in and cried:

"Tell Feodor his mother is lying by the crucifix. She's lying there—I believe—she's dying . . ."

He rushed out again and on to the squire's, knocked, went in, but with an eye to safety halted near the door. His heart was bursting with fear. If he were to kill me, by God, he would be right—he said to himself.

His master was standing by the window, dreaming aloud to himself:

". . . had to go hunting, and hunt wild animals and never get them . . ." He was thinking: the forest, twilight over everything, a crackling in the dry twigs—yes, a stag! Stately, gentle, with high haunches—the gun is in my hand: I move—I know I do it purposely: the beast catches my scent—prepares to leap—bounds into the air—into the twilight. Its whole body is a moving, arching streak, a beautiful line, dark on light . . . then the gun cracks out—the echo laughs contemptuously—the stag has

gone—it is still trembling a little, perhaps, standing by a clear, cold stream trickling through moss and flat stones.

He gave a start, and swung round.

"What do you want?"

". . . I thought you might have called me . . ."

"No, I didn't call you."

The servant remained there, hesitating.

"Do you want anything else?"

"Ah, no, master . . ."

He went. Out there it was beginning to snow.

"Vassilii!"—the squire called after him—"don't go away! Stay about: perhaps I'll have something more for you to do!"

Why had he said that? He did not know: nor did he give it a thought. He did not even know whether he had said it.

He was as calm as if he had just done a good deed, quiet and happy, just like a child. He sat down, crossed his thick hands on the table, smiled, and looked at them.

"So Sofia loves me . . . so she loves me . . ."

Vassilii was sitting outside, by the gate. The sky was now quite dark: it was snowing—noiselessly, incalculably, in dark feathery flakes. He wanted to go out and help Sofia, or to go to Feodor and ask him what it all meant. Or to Sossia . . . He could not stop thinking of what she had confided to him, and he said to himself with a grin:

"So, the German woman! So! Well, as God wills!"

He smiled. Then he got anxious again. He hoped that Piotr had understood him properly and had fetched Sofia in out of the snow. How did she come to be there by the crucifix, with only her shift on?

She must have run out in her fever—he thought—that

must be it! She was in a high fever—she had been ill a long time!

All this lasted many minutes. The old woman felt the little snowflakes on her face: they were cold and fearfully heavy as they lay on her face and on her hands, which now, in spite of all her efforts, she could now no longer lift.

All of a sudden the squire called Vassilii, and Vassilii told him of his meeting with Sofia Karlovna and of what she had said; but he did not tell everything, for he was afraid of incensing his master, although he very much wanted to tell him all.

". . . so that's what she said, little father Ivan—that and more besides"—he said hesitantly.

"What more, then, you stupid fellow?"

Vassilii still hesitated. He pretended he was unwilling.

"That is a great secret, little father, and perhaps I might offend you—and I shouldn't at all like to do that . . ."

"So . . ."—the squire said, quite calmly and rather thoughtfully—"so it's a great secret?"

He was thinking that this "great secret" might be something that would disturb his happiness and peace. No—he thought—I don't want to know it at all!

He said nothing.

". . . then I'd better not!"—Vassilii thought, rather offended; he was bursting with desire to tell the secret. "Master will pull a long face . . . Very well! If he doesn't want to hear it . . ."

Feodor had fallen asleep by his father's side. The room had grown quite dark, and now Piotr came, bringing in

a lamp. At first he could see nothing.

"Devil take it, where are you hiding, Feodor? How quiet it is here!"

He cleared his throat. There was no sound from the darkness.

"Feodor!"—he called in a low voice: he felt rather uncomfortable, because the dead man was lying there.—Perhaps Feodor was also dead?

No answer.

He held the lamp nearer, and then he saw the boy stretched out in front of the bench, with his head on the dead man's breast. He was asleep, or he too was dead; his cheeks gleamed—they were wet; his hair was hanging down like a fringe over his ears.

"Hullo, you!"—said Piotr, who was an old, stout peasant with an unnaturally small head crowned with grey stubble; he shook him, and he woke up.

"Well?"

"Your mother . . ."

"What is it . . . ?"

"Vassilii has just gone by—very excited—he says she's lying . . ."

Feodor looked round, and now he remembered everything; his face became drawn and pale. But at that moment he felt that he could forget about his father; tears of joy welled up in his eyes:

. . . there's my mother still!—and then thoughtfully, as if he had only just heard it:

". . . she's lying . . . ?"

—and then everything seemed to turn black.

". . . she's dead?"—he screamed.

"No, Feodor! Who would say anything so blas-

phemous?—she's lying by the crucifix, Vassilii says—I couldn't make head or tail of it; he was in a hurry, Vassilii, he only looked in as he was passing . . ."

". . . by the crucifix?"

"Yes—that's what he said, and that he . . ."

But Feodor had already pushed the peasant out of his way and rushed out of the door. The door stayed open; the cold wind and night and snow drove in. The peasant shivered, shut the door, and cursed to himself.

"It's on us now"—he said to his wife—"we've got him here on our necks now . . ."

He pointed to the corner where the dead man was lying.

Feodor ran, rushed; he believed he had never run like that before in his life—he would never have believed it possible for anyone to run like that, without caring whether he fell, and got up again, whether the wind hit him in the eyes, or shadows flitted past: night, trees, ditches . . . there, there at last was the crucifix, a dark shadow against the grey veil of snow.

"Mama! Mamushka! . . ."

There she lay: small, pale and thin; it was *her* face—*her* hands—the wrinkles on *her* forehead—*her* lips—*her* hair! He recognised each feature clearly, and it moved him as if they had been long parted and now he was seeing her again.

"Mamushka!"

Snow lay on her face; her eyes were closed; he put his arm under her shoulders and lifted her up: then she opened her eyes—*her* eyes.

". . . Mama!—Mama! . . ."

He knelt by her—held her—wept—laughed—and sud-

denly felt that he would swoon—he thought: I can't bear it all any longer! He looked at her: there was snow on her naked feet, and the miserable lines of her body could be seen under her shift. The thought entered his mind that something horrible had happened—something secret —a crime——

"Don't tell me anything"—he stammered—"except: who did it? Who did this to you?"

But she was already near Heaven, though she still felt her son's arm. She felt warm and comfortable: she was no longer living and yet was not yet dead—she had a great deal more to tell him, just peacefully—she did not hear his question; nor could she see his face—it was his arm from which she knew that he was there. And that was enough for her.

"The squire . . ."—she said—but there the roses are blooming red, and the stream rises over the highest mountain tops; the waters roar, and there are terribly many little girls sitting round her, with blue bows in their hair—as it was in Stettin. She smiled: how beautiful! how pleasant! She was gliding away, wrapped in a warm, soft cloth; everything was so lovely . . .

Feodor had to realise that his mother was dead.

He knew it; it is true that for a few moments he still held her in his arm, but that was only because his brain suddenly stopped working for what seemed to be a long time: he felt as if he had died with her—and he sat there with his mother in his arm: it was only by degrees that it all came to him again—the place—the night, under the crucifix in the road—and the snow falling.

The soul of a child is not covered by the thick skin made of dry parchment which protects grown-up people

from too many emotions. Feodor had not been through much; it had not been given to him to love, and he had often imagined that he knew what suffering was. A person who suffers has no need for love: that, Feodor thought, is an old saying.

He was still a boy, very susceptible to things which attracted him; but few things attracted him, and his desires were not more numerous just because he did not know many of the desirable things of the world. But all experiences hang together a person who sees nothing worth desiring, desires nothing; a person who loves nothing that is worth desiring, does not suffer; and a person who does not suffer is overcome by a terrible feeling of superiority, by boredom—he begins to reflect, and to desire something that he has not experienced.

The priest had once had a talk with Feodor:

"You must seek Truth, Feodor," the priest said.

"Then shall I find it?"

"No—you can never find it."

"Why then should I seek it?"

The priest answered with a question:

"But is it worth while to seek something that you can find——?"

Feodor was thinking; it was night.

". . . it is night; it is only at night that men are happy. The days are too bright; they are too loud; in the day everyone can see me, and I am ashamed to show that I feel lonely. But at night it's dark; no one looks at me.

Why does everything that I've neglected—father, mother—die in the night?

WANDERERS IN THE MIST

Feodor was sitting on the smooth stump of a tree. He had suddenly found himself here and did not know how he had come here. He looked round, but he did not recognise the forest; he could not see very far, because the silent trees were standing all round him like men. It had stopped snowing, and a gentle wind was drifting across yesterday's snow. He was not yet quite awake: it was like a dream which the dreamer knows is a dream —he just lets it go on . . .

It was beginning to grow dark; the mists were rising like a grey field into the sky; it was cold; a dull, faint, luscious weariness was settling on him more and more— then, suddenly, he sprang up—once again he began to think and to feel.

I had almost gone to sleep in reality, he thought; he remembered having heard that a man who goes to sleep in the snow never wakes again; it would be an easy death, he thought: if ever I want to die I shall do it in this way . . . He remembered that luscious feeling of weariness—it had not been at all bad—he stretched himself—it was really very pleasant . . .

Up to that time he had never thought of his own death; but now the thought of death had come to him as it comes to a very old man who has lived his life through and now is compelled to think of death. It was like waking tired on a rainy morning after a night of too much whoring. Everything was insipid . . .

He set out through the forest; his lips seemed to him like two withered autumn leaves. He thought: my parents are dead, but that is not the worst: the worst thing of all is that I never loved them.

His pace slackened. On all the trees lay the snow of

yesterday, and peace.

The events of the day before came back to his mind, and he reflected on all that had happened. As he thought it over, everything slipped past him with every detail clear —"it's slipping away"—he thought with distress—"as if it's on mysterious, noiseless wheels—it's slipping—I can't stop it!"

While he was walking across the vast expanse of frozen fields and through the dimly shimmering woods, he was continuously tormented by the feelings to which he had never paid any attention in his past life. They became fiendishly acute as the memories of his life approached nearer to the crisis; ". . . I have wasted everything," he told himself. But it was no longer only grief that more and more overwhelmed him: he began also to rage against God and against his own helplessness.

He tried to console himself: ". . . after all, I'm still young!"—he thought—"there are people who are much older than I am and have been through much more than I have! What do *they* do about it?"

No, he answered himself—each person has to go through more than anyone else . . .

He broke into tears, and his anguish was terrible; he threw himself on the ground, lost faith in God, and began to doubt whether there was any meaning in life. He realised that God was nothing but the child of human cowardice, which tried to take refuge in unreality. ". . . there is no God, for there is no such thing as kindness, no pity, no unselfish devotion—no object for my yearning—nothing that I could worship, in which I could hope, in which I could trust. Nothing—there is no more pity now that Mother is—dead—thrown away."

He groaned and moaned like a sick man, sprang up once more—ran on, and round in circles—but still there was nothing except stillness and snow.

He shouted through the forest—struck blindly at the old trees—and he thought that helplessness and grief would break his heart.

"Perhaps I am mad . . ."—he thought.

It was all painful to him—to think, and not to think.

"——I will not seek something that I can never find—" he suddenly shouted in his impotent rage—as if the priest had been there with him; but there was no one with him, only the snow, and stillness.

Late in the evening, worn out and despondent, he reached the house, threw himself on the ground and fell asleep.

In the middle of the night he woke up; he got up quietly, lit the lamp and began to look at his face in a piece of glass behind which he held his hand—that made a mirror.

He looked closely at his face—a young face, with eyes gleaming with fever. He tried to examine himself quite calmly: his nose, and eyes, and particularly his mouth.

From behind him, Anna moaned in her sleep; he had not thought of her being there—he looked round, startled, like a thief, carefully put out the light, crept back softly to his place and lay down again. Anna was quiet.

Feodor slept for a few minutes at a time, but he kept waking up: his blood was roaring in his ears; he was in a fever.

He had a continuous sensation, not so much of the horror of death, nor even of grief for those who had died,

but all the time he had the constant feeling of a grievous, irreparable act of negligence, for which no atonement could be made: an overwhelming helplessness. All the dark things of his life came back to his mind, and all the evil he had done to others; but everything was suddenly engulfed in the gigantic, terrible thought that he must atone for his neglect of everything. How? Wild, fantastic ideas overwhelmed each other, cut away the ground from under each other's feet, fell on top of each other, lost all logic.

Suddenly he cried, triumphantly:

"*The squire!*——" he said, with decision; he convinced himself, talked himself into a rage—"——but for the squire I should not have lost anything! They would be still living!——"

It was not so much rage against the squire as the easy logic of fever:

"*The squire!*" he said, and he embodied all his anguish in the sullen repetition of these words: "——the squire!" Now for the first time he was thoroughly conscious of the terrible sequence of events—then he began to seek excuses for himself—he was glad to be able to throw off his guilt, his negligence, on to someone else, and already he began to speak again of God.

"Before God and man the squire is not guilty," he thought, "for both Father and Mother died out of his sight! The squire is not charged with murder, because both of them were alive when they left him——. Therefore he's not guilty," he thought, "but he must, *he must be made guilty*——"

He hit out in his fever, and Anushka woke up and was terrified. A dark and terrible idea came into the boy's

head and broadened out, infinitely alluring in its voluptuous intensity.

The whole country rose up before his eyes: menacing shades towered over the house—the spirits of this country on the borders of paganism and understanding, of lust and repentance. These shades sought a victim: in the vastness of the dark Russian plains there was the will to suffering, to destruction.

The boy smiled in his dream, laughed, and stretched his limbs: Anna, terrified, had pulled her clothes up over her head and was weeping softly to herself.

Those were terrible days! And the nights! Afterwards everyone said it had been in the air, that they had all known beforehand what was coming. But in fact it all happened by degrees, and one thing brought another in its train: guilt in this world has neither beginning nor end—old Piotr said—and quite a small act of evil brings another after it, and this in turn another.

The peasants had lost their heads, as it is called, and Piotr, the oldest among them, gathered them round him, and they had all come, as timid sheep flock round their shepherd in a storm—but Piotr could not prevent what happened, nor what followed from it, nor the further consequences . . .

No one did any work: what was there to do? It was only just September, then in a moment October came, and already snow was falling all the time; a long time ago the news of war had reached them; recruiting lists had even come in a few weeks before and were lying up at the squire's. Vassilii had told them about it, but up to now no one had taken it very seriously.

"To live is to serve God"—said Piotr—"why then should we fight?"

"But we ought to, against the Germans——"

"——the Germans? Then of course! They are our enemies; we'll march into their country and——"

"Ah, Volodia, why should we go into a foreign country? In a foreign country the spring is not red——"

"Well, and here? Here we'll all die of suffering and hunger!"

"Don't talk, Volodia! There'll be holidaying even in our street! Surely you know the proverb: 'It only takes six feet of the whole earth to make a shirt for a beggar.' We won't starve!"

One of them began to sing a mournful ditty; the others grew silent:

"Driver, don't urge on your horses!
There's no longer anything to hurry for,
There's no longer anyone to love.
Driver, don't urge on your horses!"

There was silence for a moment, then the others began to talk again—forlornly, quietly, and old Piotr added his wisdom in proverbs. A feeling of uneasiness was on them all. It was on every household, and Volodia kept looking along the road to Odoievsk as if he expected someone; but no one came, nor was he in fact expecting anyone——

They sat in the inn, sat there longer and talked more than usual; the innkeeper, Gregorii, who was also the grocer, rubbed his hands.

Suddenly the weather changed; it began to thaw, and became almost sultry, though the snow was still lying

everywhere; the men walked about aimlessly, as if they were waiting for something; the women were always running to see each other, whispering, putting their heads together. Everyone seemed to be expecting something: some great event, something new, something or other.

No one thought of doing any work.

"——did you hear how she talked? The German woman, Sofia!—How she did talk!——"

". . . both dead—who will go to the squire for us now? Who will advise us? He could read——"

"——and yet he had to die so soon——"

"——for whom? For us——!"

The men were sitting in Piotr's house; the same thought was in everyone's mind, but each one knew only that he was thinking it, and no one dared to look into the eyes of the others; they were all afraid. Suddenly the door opened—they started, as if they had been caught doing some evil deed—a woman came in, hesitating—because no one said anything—and shyly called her husband:

"Kyrill——!" Then he stood up, as if he had suddenly gone mad, sprang at her and struck her, without saying a word, so that she reeled back.

A gasp ran through the room; and now the woman had gone, the door was shut; they were sitting there again, but—first shyly, then more boldly—they raised their eyes, and exchanged glances. They were feeling: we are by ourselves! We men! We are agreed!

"Hey——" old Piotr murmured, soothingly—he felt what was coming—"there'll be holidaying even in our street——"

Volodia laughed out shrilly. They all looked up, breathing heavily. Now it was coming:

Piotr: "You're laughing?"

Volodia, despondently, laughing and sobbing at the same time: "Masha is beautiful—but she's not mine!"

And they all understood him, and they began to sob and laugh, wildly, despairingly, incessantly:

"——is not ours——"

"——what is ours——?"

"——nothing! Nothing! No bread! No human being! No happiness!"

"——the world is beautiful, but it isn't ours! And never will it be ours, never! Never!——"

"Masha is beautiful——"

They were all shouting and laughing—old, weary, fat men in rags—like children.

Then someone came in at the door, breathing out the cold air—another, another, and yet another—they were breathing heavily, reeking of drink—they were excited, and infected the others with their excitement. The heat in the little room grew greater—the air grew thick with the stifling breath of many people; they were all shouting, telling each other what all of them had known long ago:

"——the squire!"

"——dragged herself along——"

"——naked, in her shift, crucifix——"

"——in the snow——"

There was a sudden quiet, and then someone or other said, in a low voice of absolute despair: "——and so now she's dead too!"

And one after the other they began to cry out, with

passionate gestures, angrily and more angrily, until they were all screaming at the tops of their voices:

"What can we do?"

"What then can we do?"

"What then can we do?"

"Drink!"—someone cried out, with a howl. It was Volodia. "Drink!"

They swarmed across to the inn, but Gregorii, the innkeeper, was afraid—he did not want to let them in.

"It's too late, children!"—he said, but they pushed each other forward; those at the back pushed forward most forcibly, and they shouted: "Drink! Drink!"

They pushed him out of the way, and when he tried to defend himself they forced their way past him—tossed him out of the way without a word, like a sack that no one wants, from breast to breast—hurled him from man to man—hitting at him without caring where their blows landed, on his back, his stomach, his face——

There was a light in the inn!

"Drink!"

They swarmed over the barrels, beat them in—drank—weeping—shouting—laughing—crude spirit, syrup and vinegar; for the innkeeper was also a grocer, and the peasants made no distinction between the barrels; some lay in each other's arms, weeping, others struck each other in their open mouths. One of them stood by and cursed terribly.

"Why are you cursing, brother? Drink!"—another called to him, glancing up for a moment; and the man who had been cursing stopped for a moment, reflected, and said—"but I've been enjoying it so much, cursing like that"—and he drew in a breath and shouted out a

devilish profanity against the Holy Virgin over the barrels.

Their women knew all that was going on—they gathered like owls, silent and shivering, against the wall opposite the inn, pressing close together in the cold and loneliness of the night; they gazed with mystified eyes at the bright windows of the inn: they could not understand it; but some of them were almost relieved that the sultry unrest of the last few weeks was letting itself off in this outburst. One young woman kept on blurting out—without realising it herself—one prayer after another, until an old woman told her to shut her mouth. Then she gave a start, and was silent.

The moon hung like a bright, fragile disc in the sky; it had stopped snowing; now it was beginning to thaw again.

The innkeeper rushed off to the squire; he had been lying on his bed for a long while, but could not quite get off to sleep; he had drawn up his knees, and was clasping them in his hands; he was lying on his back, and now and then would drift off into a half-sleep, so that he could dream; but every time the bright moonlight woke him up again. He was thinking: why is it that I can't sleep? And all at once it seemed to him that he knew why—and why he had had the feeling that something was waiting for him, something because of which he could not get to sleep. It was not the bright moon that was to blame!

"There's a war on!"—he thought—"the lists they've sent me are lying there—I'd quite forgotten them! They'll put me in prison! We all ought to join in the war——!"

But in reality he knew that this was not what was disturbing him so much and keeping him awake; he did not seriously believe in the war—perhaps he had only dreamt there was a war.

"War!"—he thought, with contempt—"what does that mean! What concern is it of mine! It certainly doesn't affect me!"

And so his thoughts ran on, not too seriously, half dreamily: "——and to-morrow I can do whatever's to be done; there's plenty of time for the war; it's only just October now—the war has been on since August. Anyway, what is it after all: War? There was something of the kind some time ago—my father told me about it; in his time, too, there was a war, somewhere or other; Little Father the Tsar was shooting his cannon off at something or other, it doesn't matter what. My father quite forgot to go along with his peasants to the war, and when he thought of it after the harvest the war had been finished long ago. It's easy to forget a thing like that——!"

Faintly, sleepily:—the moon is like a lake of white flowers—war—October—how quiet it is—merry songs—little oil-lamps—hearts made of dough——

He fell asleep.

Then there was a hard, resounding knocking at the door. He woke up—started up in fright—recovered control:

"Who is there?"

Vassilii came in, glowing with excitement. He was drunk: he reeked of drink. Then a heavy burden seemed to be lifted from the squire's soul: it was *this* that he had been waiting for! Vassilii must have yet another "great secret" for him—

"——Sofia Karlovna is dead, and Nikolai, too. The peasants have driven Gregorii out of the inn and are drinking themselves drunk——" Vassilii cried.

He was stuttering with excitement—and Gregorii the grocer, who came after him, pale and breathless, pushed him out of the way—his fear of the squire was not so great as his anxiety about his house and belongings.

"——they are smashing up everything; they are shouting——"

The squire felt quite perplexed. I must make some decision—he thought—this is certainly terrible!

"—is that so?——" he began; he was quite worked up —these peasants! What's got hold of them! Something came into his head, something which he had heard was the only proper thing to do on such occasions:

"Vassilii, tell the—no——" his face grew radiant:

"Ride off—take my mare—to Odoievsk, to the Governor, and bring help—away with you!" he shouted, as Vassilii stood there open-mouthed.

Vassilii disappeared like a flash of lightning.

A few minutes later the horse went clattering out of the gate.

The squire put on his clothes in great haste—for he had quite undressed to go to bed; while he was dressing he let the terrified, belaboured grocer go on chattering; he did not listen, but was thinking all the time: "—was it right? My peasants——!"—he was feeling quite affectionate towards them, and anxious for their sake— "but perhaps they'll come up here, when they're drunk! I am alone here; nobody likes me; who will back me up?—hurry, Vassilii——!" Suddenly—he was now fully dressed—a new idea struck him:

"That's enough, shut up now!"—he said to Gregorii, who was still wailing—"Get out of here! Fix it up yourself with the peasants! What have I to do with it?"—and when he saw Gregorii's look of despair, his heart was touched, and he added, gently and with some embarrassment, as if apologising: "—or wait here till the Cossacks come——!"

With a look of terror the innkeeper stopped his wailing and stared at him—"The Cossacks?"—he cried, in bewilderment. The squire nodded. Gregorii disappeared without a word.

Ivan Kirillovich lay down in bed again, just as he was, fully dressed, put out the lamp which Vassilii had brought with him, and suddenly he laughed softly to himself.

It was dark and still in the room again; the moon had gone behind the clouds, and the snow was fast melting.

Suddenly the moon came out again; then as quick as lightning he drew his hands out from under the bedclothes, held them up and looked at them: both were quite firm, they were not trembling. The moon disappeared again, but Ivan had seen enough—he laughed—"—I've cheated it, so to speak——"—he meant the moon; and then he went on laughing softly to himself. He was now content; the Cossacks would come, and they would put everything in order; he was clear of responsibility, the storm had gone by.

He went peacefully to sleep—the moon did not come out again.

A day and another night passed. Feodor was sitting in his hut; his mother and father were lying in the next room, without any candles, waiting to be buried; but

people couldn't either buy anything, or get buried, for all the peasants were drinking, shouting and soaking, and all the labourers, too, had joined them. The squire was alone in his big house; and here, peacefully smiling, lay the dead—their chins tied up with cloths knotted over their heads: it looked as if these colourless folks with their hands crossed on their breasts were suffering from toothache—they almost made one laugh. Anna was sitting between them, her eyes were red and swollen, and there were pretty red spots on her cheeks; she was in the depths of despair, for no one bothered about her—Feodor, for example—ah—Feodor——

He was lying in the living-room, up above the stove, in the dark. Now and then he muttered something to himself—once he climbed down, lit the lamp and wrote a letter—his mother had taught him how to write. The next moment he tore it up, re-wrote it; he was writing with a small, blunt pencil, and it occurred to him that once it must have been quite new and bright, as it came from some factory in the West—from some factory *in the West*——. The West: far-away, strange—his eyes began to gleam—then he wept——.

In the evening—he had spent the whole day, without eating anything, lying up on the stove, all the time hovering between feverish sleep and dark, confused wakefulness—he got up, took off all his clothes and looked at his bright, soft, young body; then he washed himself carefully—knelt down before the Madonna, said something in low tones, stood up—there was nothing specially striking about him, except perhaps his eyes, which seemed a little bigger than usual, a little darker—more resolute.

Then he went straight into the next room. Anna was

kneeling between her dead parents, who were lying on two boxes. She was praying. When Feodor gently stroked her head she gave a sudden start, looked up—and when she saw who it was her face grew pale, and she tried to say something: "—Feodor——"—but then he turned round without a word, and went out.

He walked down through the village, and was surprised to see that the women in every house, as he passed, came and peered out of the windows with anxious, troubled eyes, and immediately disappeared again without giving him a greeting. As he passed along the street it was like a mysterious, ghostly procession—everyone he saw went through the same ritual, without making a sound. It was only when he came to the inn that things were different. There was warmth—shouting—singing—the light of many lamps streaming through the windows—music in wild rhythms, peasant dances—his blood, his feet were caught by the rhythm; he felt its sinister urge to abandon his purpose, to go in there and do what they were doing, to drink with them, with them to find forgetfulness—and then he broke away—he ran—till his breath gave out and he came to a halt. There was stillness all round him.

Everything was still.

He looked at the landscape: the forest, shimmering far and near in the pale shadows of the moon; it was as if his own heavy heart lay beyond and over the forest. He looked all round him—he swallowed down something that rose in his throat; his heavy heart still lay over the distant forest: now I shall never see the forest again—he said.

"My dear Feodor!"—he said to himself—and he had to

laugh a bitter laugh, with his lower lip pushed out and the corners of his mouth drawn down—he was trying to give himself determination and courage, but the slight movement died away, and his chin began to quiver a little; for there lay this pale, lovely forest, which he would never again see; it is true the snow had begun to melt, but it was still sparkling there, white and pale, as if in a restful fairy-story.

He began to get cold—he stuck his hands into his pockets; the pockets were holes in the cloth, and he felt his naked, warm legs. The blood suddenly rushed to his head: "—to be with a woman again just once more——" he thought, and shut his eyes—"ah, that blessed surging stream—and the eternal, wonderful weariness after it——" —he thought of what came after, this boy—of something that a man does not think about in other circumstances, when he wants a woman——

He went slowly on, and as he walked along a mournful melody came into his head, and he hummed it:

"The little hens are weary—
And the roofs of the houses are now going to sleep—
Good night, moon, I cannot help you,
You must stay awake! God wants it so!"

Little pieces of ice crackled under his feet: they were the frozen grass-blades, which snapped as he walked on them. And the forest—over which his heart lay heavy, heavy—drew slowly past, in alternate light and shadow—the sound of his steps did not ring far—a little wind sprang up, bringing along the air from somewhere or other.

Now he had reached the manor-house!

Here he stood still; he felt how small and poor he was, in front of this mansion with its iron fences, its stone walls and its roof of wood and stone; it loomed dark against the pale autumn sky, and so firm—so strong—so unspeakably solid! And *he* was in it! *He* filled all the rooms of this giant house; it seemed to Fedia as if that man must be in every room: a giant with heavy eyebrows and broad, smooth, gigantic hands—an old man—a hard, terrible being—a square idol—a fabulous monster, cruel and solitary—he was standing at every window—behind the panes—which are opaque to everyone but him. He was a giant—a dark ogre—ruling a kingdom unseen, unknown——

"——and I am young—nothing more than a heart over a forest, in the winter——"—and he felt his helplessness and despair.

Then, just when he was about to abandon his purpose, he looked up into the sky. He had almost succumbed to his weariness, like all the others in the village—perhaps he was just on the point of saying:

"Ah—that's how it's always been, wasted and vain! God will know why—yes—yes—nothing's any good, I must keep calm——"

Then he looked up into the sky.

It was pale, like a bluish-grey cloth over a brighter cloth. The moon looked flat and yellow—in the far distance the clouds sank noiselessly behind the forest—and then the stars shone out. He looked at one twinkling star. Someone had once told him that all the stars were like the earth—worlds, which were so far away that they seemed so tiny. And now, as he looked at this twinkling star, it suddenly occurred to him that there was a world up

there! Forests and peasants and here and there towns and everything: *a world!* The sublime grandeur and a great yearning overwhelmed him—he trembled with terror at this immensity—he fell on his knees:

——world!—far, far-away world!—people up there—with faces, hands, eyes—and they, too, are miserable—I am a brother, across this infinite sky——

He wept—his tears bruised him, shook him, and he looked upwards: for the first time in his life he had a deep sense of God: he prayed—humbled himself—his mouth quivered—he prayed—without a word, his whole heart cried out to the sky——

He stood up—stretched himself—glanced at the dark manor-house and laughed theatrically: disdainfully, contemptuously:

"——we must protect each other—here and up there—we must stand together——!"

His confidence and strength had grown greater through this realisation of humanity in the stars; he flung open the gate of the courtyard—cast one more more glance back, but without any weakening: it's worth while to die, he told himself—and he breathed deeply. "God will help me: I must die, that is not so hard—but the squire must live to atone for murdering me! God must see to that——!"

Feodor went round the house, to the back entrance; it was open, and he entered the house; softly, almost inaudibly, he crept from door to door. He knew where the squire slept—at night he had often enough seen the lighted window—this door must be the one!

He tried to open it quietly, then—it was locked.

Everything seemed to reel in front of his eyes—but at

the same moment he realised that, if he hesitated now—and his instinct to live drove him with all his nerves to hesitate—that then all would be over for him, and that what must happen would never happen——. He heard whispering—moans—coming from inside the room—he almost swooned:

—with a rush forward, he threw his shoulder with all his strength against the door—the lock was a poor one, and the weight of his mad anger terrible: the wood cracked and splintered, and he rushed forward precipitously—into the darkness—fell heavily on the floor—on his shoulder, still smarting—howled with the pain, like a beast—saw nothing but red, bright red, before his eyes, though it was night—was overcome with sudden anger—unrestrained—mad—he screamed—bared his teeth —fell down—picked himself up:

There, there he is, that must be the man:

——he was lying naked, on top of another, whiter body —the moonlight was on him, and he saw: a gigantic man, covered with black hair, like the devil, and yet naked and mean—he raised himself, a dull sound—the white skin under him slipped out smoothly—a moment's pause: "Sossia!"—she wound herself out from under him, noiselessly, like a snake—a row of pictures flashing past him in furious haste: her mouth, opened in terror—the small red point of her breast—and then nothing was left but:

That man!

Everything whirled round him; the lad struck with both hands against that face, fixed his teeth into flesh, and already felt that he was losing consciousness—as he reeled before some supernatural force—but his teeth held their grip—everything turned black; but still he was conscious

of one thing, even in that eternal darkness, reeling, swooning:

"——wet—dark—for ever gushing—warm—blood——"

——and reeling—reeling—reeling——

All this happened in quite a short space of time. The girl, wrapping herself in some coat or other, ran the whole way back, quite silently—along past the pale forest, shadowy in the night, and straight on into the inn. There it was light; she looked up—and now she suddenly began to shriek—pulled the door open—was blinded by the light after the darkness, and that brought back to her like a flash the realisation of what she had experienced; she fell to the ground, but the next moment was up again, saying something, in shrill, quick, hard tones, the same thing over and over again.

The drunken men did not bother themselves about her; but one of them shut the door. The orgy had passed its zenith. A couple of dancers were lying in a heap on the floor, just as they had fallen in the midst of their wild revel—but the musicians were still playing. Then the heap sorted itself out, and she saw a young lad with glassy eyes, cavernous cheeks and a peaked black cap. For a second Sossia stopped screaming, and looked round—then something struck her—she became aware of something—she was naked. She rushed out, anywhere, just to get away, into the darkness . . .

Somewhere along the road she stopped to rest. It's night, she thought, it's all a dream.

She looked up, and saw a heavy shadow looming over her: the crucifix!

She screamed out—imagined to herself that Sofia

Karlovna was lying there—and then it seemed to her that she had committed some crime, that she was being hunted. She heard sounds, coming nearer, wild and hurried—Sossia began to run, ran into the forest and collapsed on the ground. All the women were together in company; they could not get to sleep. One of them carried her to a hut, and rubbed her frozen limbs.

What a night that was!

The person whom Sossia had heard approaching was Vassilii. He was digging his heels into the mare's flanks like a madman; foam stood out like a balloon from the mare's jaws. He saw the lights in front of the inn. He pulled up, jumped off and flung open the door.

"——Cossacks are coming——!" he shouted in to them.

He remained standing in the open doorway: the thick steam of liquor, heat and human sweat reached him, warm and unpleasant. He stood there—tall, dark, gloomy, breathless, worn out and tired to death—and shouted from the doorway:

"——Cossacks are coming——!"

The music broke off; a last faint note hung on the strings; the men went on standing where they were, half-naked. Quite young lads were there, with eyes that looked as if they were made of glass; as soon as they stood still for a second they began to reel, their eyelids drooped, and they tottered. Some of them who were stretched out on the ground, with grimy, savage, white faces, half raised themselves: it was like the dead awaking. In a moment they were no longer drunk—they sprang to their feet, and the reeling dancers stood up firmly; their vacuous white eyes hardened. An old man was lying sideways across a table, his left hand hanging down like the hand of a

corpse—now the hand moved, and he turned slowly over on to his back; his face was set, and he strained his ears to listen, as if he were hard of hearing.

"The squire"—Vassilii howled, gasping for breath—"he's sent for the Cossacks. They'll be here soon, about dawn. There's war . . ."

Everyone knew what that meant; it was the irrevocable end. The men rushed forward, towards Vassilii. The same thought was in all their minds: the lust to suffer, to cheat fate through suffering, and have done with it all: then nothing would matter—already nothing mattered! One of them picked up the lamp and flung it into the half-empty oil-barrel; the flames crackled and flared up; they all turned and looked at it. The old man on the table felt it drawing him to it, drawing him to jump into it and be consumed. To let his skin be burnt brown, to stand in the flames and be burnt to nothingness—now, with all the people round him. But just then something else swept him away—someone else shouted, screamed, sweeping him and all the others along with the cry: "To the squire!"

They knew here what Cossacks were! Little black horses, with manes reaching to the ground, and, squatting on them, fellows with squinting eyes, flat noses and no mouths—and no mercy, no listening to "Lord Jesus!" They came dashing like lightning, hither, thither, wheeling round, back again—hey, Mother of God! They cut the girls' bellies open—Cossacks! That's hell! When they come, it's the end . . .

"To the squire!"—the peasant shouted.

Their passions were suddenly at white heat; for many days none of them had slept with their wives, none of

them had calmed down and rested. Their passionate lust —the long tongues of flame rising into the grey dawn— the bulging eyes of the others—the horror of the little horses which would soon be upon them—the hoarse, sensual cries on every side—the terrible feeling that everything was now driving to the end—all of this united with the misery of years, the death of the Semiovskis, this night of violence and frenzy—hey, the flames shot up! There was Vassiliii! Scream—scream—scream:

"——squire!"

They rushed forward, running, screaming, a horde of hardly human shapes. Their tongues were hanging out of their mouths like the tongues of wild beasts; one of them fell, and another tumbled over him—no one took any notice; they ran on, panting, while the yellow flames rose to the morning sky and lashed their gleaming tongues. Then they reached the courtyard; they hesitated for less than a second, and then broke into the house like wild beasts.

As each one looked back and saw the flames mounting over the village, he felt a great madness overwhelm him; the hard line of flames lay like a cloud over the whole village, moving majestically, swaying slightly from side to side, shooting up into the sky, yellow, red and glaring.

Now nothing matters—one of them thought; he had remained calm. The cry of revenge was rising from their souls—revenge for their whole lives! Revenge for dirt and dreariness! For old, tired women! For those horrible drunken bouts and the whip . . . !

"The squire . . . !"

He himself was sitting quite calmly in front of Feodor

Semiovski, naked, on the side of the bed. The lad, inanimate and bleeding, lay on the floor in front of him. Old Piotr was the first to find the room. He looked at the two of them, and howled out like a wild beast—in a high, shrill tone like a whistle—

"Him, too . . . !"

Without another word he and the peasants rushed at the squire; an iron axe struck home, and his brain cracked open with a horrible sound; twenty heavy fists belaboured his naked body; kicks caught him in the face—and now he was not moving any more . . .

Suddenly Piotr had a vision: the face of the squire was looking at him, quite calmly, with no sign of distress, with big, clear, intelligent eyes. "What's making you do this?"—the squire asked.

The vision vanished.

He lay there; the peasants shouted, danced round him; those who had not already done so kicked him where his face had been; then they stopped and rested.

Then someone outside screamed, in a piercing scream:

"——Cossacks——!"

Another:

"——they're here——!"

Then they all ran away, scattered hither and thither, anywhere to get away. They saw the flames already like a tall round pillar over the forest, and no one looked round any more—they rushed, ran in different directions —into the forest on the eastern side, to save their lives; there they were safe from the fire, because the manor-house lay between them and the village, and there was an open space round it, with no trees. No one took leave of

another—no one looked where the others were going—they ran, bounding like hunted beasts. Their hands were covered with blood and earth; it was October.

The Cossacks surrounded the wood and drove the people in. Some of the peasants and labourers got away—Kirill, Vladimir, Piotr, Gregorii and the girl Sossia. All of the others were captured and taken off to Odoievsk for trial. The village was burned down; the Cossacks did not bother themselves about it. Two corpses were left in the manor-house—the landowner Ivan Kirillovich Szegedin and the labourer Feodor Nikolaevich Semiovski. They were left lying where they were found, so that the judicial commission would find everything undisturbed when they made their investigation. But because there was a war on, all communications were slow, and it was eight days before the imperial commission came to the place. By then the two corpses had disappeared; nothing was found but a burnt-down village, the ruins of which were deep in snow. Besides that, there were only white roads, without a trace of man or beast, and solitude, and a clear sky.

The peasants Kirill, Gregorii, Vladimir and old Piotr had either been captured afterwards or had given themselves up; the winter had set in, and they were helpless in the forest—they got hungry . . .

When old Piotr was being led in chains through Odoievsk, Vassilii was standing by the side of the street. Piotr recognised him and greeted him with his eyes. Piotr stopped; the soldiers waited patiently: he was an old man, and in Russia one had time.

"God bless you, Vassilii! So you got away, you

rascal . . ."—old Piotr said, with a laugh. He spoke in a low voice, for there'd be trouble if the soldiers heard.

"Where is Sossia?"

"Didn't she get . . . ?"

"No, I don't think she did!"

"A smart girl: where'll she have gone?"—he thought for a moment, and then he remembered something, and said hurriedly:

"She has relatives, I believe they're her mother's people, near Warsaw . . ."

"Come on!"—the soldiers said; it was a cold, bright day. "Don't be talking to people! It's not permitted to talk! That's strictly forbidden!"

A few days later all those from the village who had been caught were shot, on a charge of murdering the landowner; it was war-time; things had to be hurried.

Vassilii made his way through to Tula and joined up voluntarily with his regiment. It was in training; that took a couple of weeks. Then it was sent off to the front. The train rolled on—it was labelled for Warsaw. They sang songs; their rifles seemed light. The train went on and on through the vast countryside, day and night; by night the dark blue sky was filled with stars. The train rolled on; the comrades were sleeping . . .

During this period Feodor was not having an easy time.

The day after the peasants had fled from the Cossacks, he woke up. He was lying on his stomach, with his hands over his head clutching at the floor; all his nails were broken. He woke up, but at first he did not realise that he was alive, for he was terribly exhausted. His eyelids were like lead, and there was a rumbling in his ears like

a heavy wagon. He fell asleep again.

He woke up a couple of times more without beginning to think; it was only in the afternoon that his brain—like a clock that is slow in starting—began to work once more. At first he only grasped that he was tired—and *how* tired! Like a cog-wheel this idea linked up with another:

"Where am I?"

He lay motionless. "Ah, that's it, I'm dead."

The wheel began to turn rather more quickly: "What was it that happened . . . ?—Ah, that's it, yes, yes! I got myself murdered by the squire; but what was the point of it? Yes, I remember, so that he should never again have any peace in his life—he was to go on living! But did he murder me?"—he considered the point for a long while; his head was very painful—"Yes, he *did* murder me . . ."

An interval.

". . . and so it's true that the soul is immortal, for here I am! The priests were right after all . . . !"

He slowly set his brain in motion and began to think of the priest, a tall, solemn, dark figure with a long brown beard, spectacles and a great cross. When the priest came into the room unexpectedly—in the evening—it made you jump; but then you laughed. There were a good many stories about him! For example, Grischa said that whenever he eased nature he would sing psalms—"I hear him singing!"—then we spied round the corner—Grischa had led us there. There he was squatting, carrying out the most profane business in the world—dignified, upright, solemn, with his cross and his spectacles, and singing humbly in a low voice: "Lord Jesus, thou art merciful . . . !"

Feodor fell asleep, and dreamed about the priest. The priest was walking along over the forest, and his brown monk's cloak hid the sun, so that it turned very cold; he felt very cold, and he huddled up his shoulders. Feodor noticed that the priest had a pointed nose, and there was no glass in his spectacles; the lenses had fallen out on to the road in a thousand splinters, and the fragments were lying there on the road.

Feodor tried to stand still, so as not to walk on the glass, but he could not stand still—something was driving him on. He tried to stop, groaned, sighed "Halt!" But his legs went on and on of themselves; fear gripped his throat, for meanwhile the priest had pulled down the sun and put it—the fiery sun—into his pocket. Now there was only the moon there, yellowish, pale and shadow-like. The priest was slowly disappearing beyond the forest; he was getting smaller and smaller. Then he, Feodor, reached where the glass from the spectacles was lying on the road through the forest, and he saw the whole road strewn with glass, in sharp splinters. His naked feet stumbled, and he fell down full-length on the sharp splinters of glass; he was quite naked, and the splinters bored into his body everywhere, in every tender place—he moaned, screamed out, and woke up . . .

He raised his head and looked round him. His brain was clear again: this is the squire's room; it is night; the moon is shining in at the window—"So I'm not dead . . . !"—he thought.

This thought was the most welcome, and at the same time the most terrible which he had ever had. He went on thinking it, without intermission. Now and then he felt terribly ashamed of himself, when he caught him-

self thinking that he was lucky to be alive.

"But I *must* die!"—he thought, pressing his lips tight together—"I must just *make* him kill me!"

By degrees his intervals of unconsciousness grew shorter, and he was conscious for longer periods at a time; but he could not yet move at all. His whole body was painful; it had turned almost black; it was particularly painful when he had to ease nature. He remembered his dream, and in order to soften the pain, he tried to sing while he was at it, like the priest. When he was first able to raise himself up a little, with an effort—it was only on the following day—he saw the squire lying a yard behind him. His mouth was hanging open, his nose was fractured, and both his hands seemed to be broken. His naked body was covered with hair and blood. But it was not so much the sight of him like that which shook Feodor. It was rather the feeling that the man ought not to be dead, that it was his—the squire's—duty to kill him, Feodor; he ought not to be dead, he must not be dead!

His own pains were forgotten: Feodor crawled slowly across to the body and lifted up the head. It was infinitely heavy, and the congealed blood cracked like paper; there was a deep hole in the skull, covered over with blood and hair. An appalling sense of misery overwhelmed Feodor, and at the same time he felt the hope—even the certainty—that *he could not be dead!*

He dragged himself to the window; from it he saw a tired, black flame—more like dark smoke—like a wide basin over the whole village and forest. There was no sign of any human beings. The fire had nothing more to feed on, and was now being slowly stifled in the burnt-out wreckage.

All sorts of things came into his head: the savage peasants, the inn gleaming in the night, the silent women . . .

"War . . . !" he thought.

He began to realise how the end had come: the village bowed down under the ferocious squire astride his mare; his father going up to the squire, like a man; the burning down of their house; the ruin of his parents and of the village; the death of his father, of his mother—one thing leading to another. It was the way a clock works: a little wheel, set in motion without guilt of any kind, began to move, carrying a larger wheel with it; this wheel drove another wheel, and it in turn another; one guilt brought another guilt—they were all guiltless, but they had all been forced to sin . . .

He pieced things together: the peasants found me here; straightway they killed him; then they got frightened and burned down the village . . . for my sake! Because they thought that he had killed me, too! And for that reason they have lost and abandoned hearth and home—they have lost everything, abandoned everything.

". . . *I owe it to them to make him kill me!*"

This sentence came to his mind again and again, growing clearer, the urge of it plainer, more insistent.

"I owe it to them to make him kill me!"

He stayed there at the window until morning; his pain and his weakness were forgotten.

"I owe it to them . . ."

He knelt down by the squire, took his face in his hands and tried to warm it with the whole warmth of his own young body; he rubbed the face, brought water and poured it over the worst wounds, prayed, panted, blew his

breath into that lifeless mouth. He grew frenzied, and screamed: "He *must* wake up!"

His thought and his will were concentrated on this one idea; his veins swelled until they were near bursting; his eyes were bulging from their sockets. He wanted it so much! He stared at those closed eyes, as if trying to hypnotise the dead man:

"You must wake up!"

And the squire groaned, stirred a little, and opened his eyes. It was a miracle! He looked at the lad, and when he saw who it was he moved his lips as if trying to say something. Feodor bent down to him, and as he did so he looked into the squire's eyes: they were clearer and more gentle than they had ever been before.

"You—must—not—be—angry—with—me—Feodor," the squire said, "—I—am—not—guilty——I —there—is—a—great—secret.—Vassilii—knows——"

There was a long pause between each word, and with each word—blood. . . .

The squire was dead. His lips grew thin, and quickly turned blue; his chin immediately dropped.

It was night again. The fire in the village flickered up and went out. Snow began to fall softly, and the next moment it was thawing again.

Little birds were crying, in piping, miserable tones.

After two or three days Feodor was able to stand upright again and to walk about slowly. He moved carefully, for he still had two open wounds, which he had bound up himself; the swellings were gradually going down. In the squire's writing-table he found eight hundred roubles in fifty-rouble notes. He left two notes

there, so that no one should think that anything had been stolen; for why should a thief not take all there was? Feodor had never seen so much money before in his life. He hid the notes in his clothing. Now I'm a thief, he thought, and he laughed.

He must find Vassilii, in order to learn what the great secret was. It was clear that until he had found him—so he thought—it was right for him to go on living, just till then . . .

But *where* was he to look for him? The village—he had been down to have a short look round—was dead, quiet as the grave; everyone had gone, and there were as many Vassiliis in the world as pine-needles. He did not even know his father's name or his surname; but he was lucky, for in the writing-table he found the mobilisation list, and in it:

"Vassilii Ivanovich Lidin, labourer, born January 3, 1892, Petrovskoie village, Odoievsk district."

And also his own name:

"Feodor Nikolaievich Semiovski, son of a house-owner, born September 23, 1895, Petrovskoie village, Odoievsk district."

He wrote down Vassilii's full name and put the paper away with the money. He belonged to the same regiment as Vassilii; in Tula, that was where he would find him.

Now and then there would come over him a feeling of pleasure at being alive—a secret feeling which gave him sensual enjoyment. But when he thought about it he knew that his conscience was uneasy, and he had to console himself by thinking that it was not his fault that he was still alive; he had done his part, and would be ready

again later on, when he had found Vassilii—but it will be a long time till then, his feelings whispered mischievously. Quiet! Quiet!—his conscience said.

He slept here one more night, and early in the morning he dragged the squire down into the village, to the spot where Semiovski's house had once stood. The snow had gone; tiny flames were still playing under the ruins of the village.

Feodor dragged himself along as far as the nearest railway station, and went by train from there to Tula. At Tula he bought some clothes and a new cap, and went to the doctor; the gash in his arm had healed quickly, but the wound in his pelvis had festered, and he had to go into hospital. That was a lovely time: he was given narcotics, and he was operated on; he dreamed, grew more restful; his pain lessened; there were kind faces—quiet—everything was white. After three weeks they let him out; it was the end of November. He reported for duty at the barracks.

An old soldier with a long grey beard was standing at the entrance.

"Halt!"

Feodor said politely what his name was and what he wanted. He was still weak and pale; he walked with a stoop, and much thinking had given his eyes a shy and gleaming look. What he had been through was still there in his eyes; it seemed as if they were looking at something which others could not see, the soldier thought.

Feodor was in a large town for the first time in his life. People—women carrying baskets—others in close-fitting,

beautiful clothes—men who were natural and straightforward, in groups—and then the lamps, the houses, the tramway which kept tinkling all the time . . .

". . . then go into the room on the right!"

Feodor went in.

They hunted in a great book. The clerk called an officer, a slender young man with a very wide nose. He talked through his nose, and stared at the lad with his watery blue eyes. When he took off his cap, Feodor saw that he was completely bald.

"How is it you've only got here now, you sluggard? Hey?"

Feodor explained that he had been ill for a very long time, and, moreover, had just been three weeks in hospital; he showed his certificate, and Feodor was surprised to find that the officer could read. The lieutenant read the certificate right through, with Feodor's eyes fixed attentively on his face.

"Isn't there someone from your village already here?"—the lieutenant observed casually as he was reading.

"Vassilii?"—Feodor asked, almost gasped—"please tell me, little father, lord . . ."

The officer glanced up at him and then looked at the list.

"Yes, Vassilii Ivanovich Lidin," he said abruptly. "Third Company: off to the front early this morning."

. . . this morning! If I had only reported yesterday! What was I doing that I didn't come? Walking about in the streets, after a girl, among all those wonderful lights—then slept in a little tavern—"and this morning Vassilii went off to the front! What held me back from reporting yesterday? I wanted to come. Then why didn't I? Per-

haps I knew that Vassilii would be off to-day . . . My God, but that's not true!"

There was an inspection that same afternoon. He had to undress and take a bath; he got his hair cut, and then he was directed to go to a large hall, which had formerly been a girls' gymnasium; the gymnastic apparatus was still there against the walls—for example, a yellow vaulting-horse covered with shabby leather.

Feodor looked round the hall—"there used to be little girls here, gentle-folk, neat, clean and warm"—he thought to himself—"with little black pigtails smelling of soap, and in little high boots . . ."; no one paid any attention to him: shyly and furtively he passed his hand over the places which had been worn thread-bare . . .

"Semiovski!" someone shouted. Feodor jumped and clenched his teeth; he suddenly felt how solitary he was, and his heart grew heavy; he took his place in a gap in a long row of men who were standing there. Then he raised his eyes and looked round:

Forty naked men were standing in a row—hairy and smooth-skinned, red, corpulent, with folds of fat, thin, with their bones projecting! He gulped down a feeling of nausea. Bright, friendly light and sun shone on them, making distorted shadows; the men were cold, and they huddled up their shoulders and shivered slightly, as if a wave had run along the line.

At that moment Feodor grew up. Earlier in his life he had thought to himself that beyond the village there must be a great deal to see and experience, and when he set out on his search for Vassilii he made up his mind to say as little as possible, to take things in, and never to be

surprised at anything—but, he resolved, he would never try to forget why he was still allowed to be alive and what he had been through. In the meanwhile he had seen a great deal, and noticed everything; he had a great gift for adapting himself to circumstances, and, moreover, he knew how to keep silent. He was obsessed with the idea of dying as soon as he had found out the secret.

The people—the forty naked, old people with wide folds round their bodies, thick beards and gigantic red noses—were *laughing* at him, he suddenly realised: there was a great red scar running from his genitals to his thigh, and it shone scarlet.

One of them whispered to another, and the forty men leaned forward, nudged each other, laughed and guffawed; they were all gaping at the scar—the lad's naked thigh—neighing, laughing.

Feodor did not move a muscle, but a wave of homesickness came over him, and he felt like running away or falling dead. Sobs choked him, but he swallowed them down and kept his face set. He stood quite straight, with his eyes fixed in front of him; there—he saw—a little yellow shoe, probably forgotten by some girl, was hanging on a ladder.

For one moment he felt an inclination to rush at these men, take them by the throat and bite their gullets; his hands were already itching, and his eyes saw red—but then his eyes fell on the shoe, and he looked straight in front of him and smiled till the tears came into his eyes . . .

The doctor came along in a white overall, with a couple of men in uniform; the men stopped laughing; once more their shoulders hunched up, and they became a row of

forty naked, shivering men.

One after the other was called forward, questioned, measured, weighed, examined. Feodor looked closely at each face; they all had thin or fat, long or broad faces; there was not a face among them which he would ever forget, and on them all and on each one he could still see little wrinkles from when they had laughed at him. He felt an unbounded contempt for the lot of them, and there was not a single one of their faces which made him think any better of them or gave him any feeling of friendliness. And then, standing among forty naked men and in front of the doctor and the officials who had to examine the recruits, he began to think—grimly, arrogantly—"Everyone is against me! Everyone has been laughing at me!" . . . And because of that, he thought, they will *all* die in the war!—He was absolutely sure of it; it soothed him to be so sure—he felt as certain of it as if God had given His word on it.

They examined him; the doctor had some misgivings, but he was passed.

"Third Company . . . !"

The same Company as Vassilii.

As he went out of the gymnasium he passed close by the ladder and took the little shoe away with him. Late that night—in a strange bed and with everyone sleeping all round him—he clasped the shoe to his heart. The shoe had a faint scent.

He wept.

PART II

PLACE:

The office of an examining magistrate, in Central Berlin; a room with a bright green-patterned carpet. The magistrate is sitting at a yellow desk, with his clerk at a smaller table a little to the side. There are two small windows, through which leafless branches can be seen; blue folders, thick with dust, fill the high shelves round the room. There is the faint smell of a cigar, but no one is smoking.

Time:

December, 1924, about eleven o'clock in the morning.

Persons:

Dr. Karl Heinemann, Examining Magistrate; a small, slightly deformed, black-haired gentleman with a tendency to baldness. He has a very high-pitched voice, which often cracks when he is excited. His eyes are grey and intelligent; they are very sensitive to light of any kind. His favourite author is Rabelais.

The clerk; a tall, thin man, with long, dragging steps and a prehistoric cut-away coat.

The prisoner, who is under detention and has been brought in for examination; he is Feodor Nikolaievich Semiovski, no nationality, known as Fritz Semiovski; according to the depositions he is twenty-nine years of age; the officials do not believe that that is his age, but cannot make up their minds whether he is much younger or much older. He is of medium build, with shoulders rather too broad for his height; his face is drawn and haggard, and his dark hair is unkempt and streaked with grey.

He has a fine forehead, not high, but wide and strong. His eyes, with their expression of Slavonic melancholy, are particularly striking; at first sight they seem shifty and hypocritical, but in any case they are dark, sensitive and penetrating, and it is not easy to meet their gaze for long; the eyelashes are short but thick. The rest of his face is closely in keeping with his eyes; the lines on it, like the perspective lines of a drawing, lead to the eyes; the features are sharp and angular. His hands are large, red and rough. His clothing is proletarian, rather ragged and covered with mud.

The conversation takes place in German, which the prisoner speaks fluently, with a hard, slavonic accent.

The magistrate sent the clerk out of the room, and when he had gone pointed to a chair in front of the desk at which he himself was sitting. The prisoner hesitated for a moment and then sat down; his face was excited, determined, expectant.

The examining magistrate looked at his finger-nails, and then, without raising his eyes, began to speak:

"I shall be frank with you; I shall, so to speak, lay my cards on the table . . ."

He threw a quick glance at the prisoner, but the latter had not reacted. The magistrate resumed his inspection of his finger-nails.

"I've made up my mind to do something for you, something quite exceptional, and that is, to quash the investigation and let you go free . . ."

The prisoner looked up. His face relaxed, and seemed to grow more open . . .

". . . if you'll tell me privately your whole history, just

in a friendly way, without anyone else here, and I'll promise not to make any use of it. . . . Do you understand what I mean . . . ?"

The prisoner answered guardedly, slowly, weighing each word:

"I don't know, sir, what good it is to you to learn my story. You must tell me that first; you must excuse me, but I can't believe that you would be so stupid as to do something for me unless you were going to get something out of it! It's no use your saying that isn't so—I know very well that kindness can only be mutual—there's no such thing as kindness for nothing . . ."

The magistrate got up and began pacing up and down. There was a gentle tap on the door, and a policeman stuck his head through the chink, as if he wanted to make sure that the prisoner was still there. The magistrate gave a start, looked up, and suddenly shouted at the policeman in a harsh, high-pitched voice, which cracked in the middle; it was unpleasant to hear—the room had been so quiet.

The magistrate sat down again at his desk.

A pause.

The prisoner's dirty, cold hands were resting on the table; all at once the magistrate looked up and laid both his own white, manicured, warm hands on them. Leaning forward across the desk, he looked at the prisoner with an expression of frank sincerity. The touch of those warm, sensitive, well-kept, confiding hands seemed to run right through Semiovski.

"Don't you understand me?" the magistrate said in an ingratiating voice.

Fritz sighed, and then began to tell his long and rather

confused story, starting with the beginning of the war.

"War is murder! Knife-points stuck into people's bodies, into people's flesh, and screwed round in their flesh; fire all round you; nights in pits full of water, alone, and above you, like a sheet of cloth, one bullet after another, for hours at a time, for years on end. Once someone screamed, somewhere . . ."—he had recognised him at once; it was the man he was hunting for—Vassilii. He rushed to him through the barbed wire, through the bullets. Vassilii! There he lay, raving about Sossia—that he must go to Warsaw, to see her—and just then a bugle rang out, an order, relief troops, shouting—he had to go back, leaving Vassilii lying there. In the night the ambulance-men took him off somewhere; when Feodor went to where he had been lying, he was gone. The war went slowly on to its end. He fled from the civil war, came to Warsaw, and wandered round for weeks, half insane with hunger. Then at last he heard something, at a little grey tumble-down house: Sossia had lived there, with her mother's sister. But they had all gone to Germany; yes, a man was with them too, a Russian! There was famine in Poland, and everyone was fleeing westwards, always westwards, to Berlin. In Germany there were things to be had.

So Fritz, too, had come to Berlin.

". . . now I'm here . . ."

A long pause; a clock struck something.

". . . but what you specially ought to know, sir, I haven't told you yet. I'll tell you what it is:

"Stop judging people! There's no point in it! We are all guilty! No one can look anyone else in the eyes! For example, there are film stars—blondes, with ringlets—

they smile, and they just move their shoulders a little—and there is a chauffeur, sir, or you yourself—the cleverer we are, the more guilt we bear. It is terrible!

"I knew one man—it's absurd, just imagine!—he was so ticklish that if his coat was hanging up and you just tickled his empty coat he would scream with laughter. In the end he went mad; at least, his people said so, when he hanged himself. What will become of us others?

"Why am I speaking to you like this? Because you put your hands on mine. Sentimentality! I could have simply howled! I could have flung my arms round you! You take advantage of my sentimentality to make me do what you want: if I had had anything to own up to, I should just have blurted it out then. You try to make me guilty. . . . See here, sir, if I go somewhere to a dance and I get talking to a young girl, then I make myself interesting to her, and I tell her I can read her like a book. I say to the girl—and instinctively I let my voice sound as if I'm diffident of prying into her soul like this—'You're really very lonely; you often lie in your bed at night and feel like crying.'

"Or I say to her: 'You're often standing in the shop, doing one thing and another, and all at once the thought strikes you: what's it all for?' Believe me, sir, every girl gets all soft and upset by a speech like that and she begins to cry, and then she likes me. At any rate, all the girls that I come across, and in the cinema they lean against me, and I feel the warmth of their bodies.

"What I mean is that we all get more and more lonely, and the girls are right. And that we're all guilty, because each of us is getting hold of other people through this loneliness of theirs, so as to get something out of them.

Patriotism or religion, all noble or mean emotions—they are all stirred up in us by other people. Some say love is home. Or faith. Or the country whose language you speak. It's all lies! It's all lies! There is no such thing as home. We're all for ever lonely and homeless.

"There's nothing new in that, sir, but it's always bringing people to ruin.

"What are you doing to stop it? To stop this suffering in the world? Why is it you are examining people? What is it that you are trying to drag out of people's souls, like a dentist dragging out teeth? What business is it of yours what other people are thinking? You're protecting human society? What right have you got to do it? How do you know how many people suffer because, for all your good intentions, you still do them harm? When I walk along the street I take the sun away from someone else. I make a shadow, though I have no desire to make one.

"And that's what it is that is bringing a whole generation to ruin! . . ."

He broke off. He had been speaking in a very loud voice, and had talked himself into a state of excitement; for a moment he could not go on, but he soon recovered control of himself.

"Why must I, for example, find out what is worth striving for, from the election promises of the political parties? If only I'd never known it! For now I'm wanting everything; I see that I can have everything; I get shown everything, but—they don't give me any of it. And that's what makes me guilty.

"See here, sir, you are probably one of these philanthropists who want to bring enlightenment to the people—anyway, that's what the election posters say. And

what have you actually done? You've made us unhappy! You are guilty, although you never intended it and although you meant well; and I am guilty, because I try to get what you offered us. If only we'd never known of its existence! If only I'd never known of anything . . ."

He had sunk down on his chair, with his head resting on his hands, weeping softly and continuously. The magistrate was embarrassed, and kept walking round him; now and then he would sit down and say a word or two.

"I—I understand it all very well"—he said, rather helplessly, rubbing his palms against each other—"what you said just now, that we are all guilty—in a hyperbolical, symbolical sense of course, not juridically. It is certainly true, disturbingly true. But there's nothing to be done about it! It's one of those youthful notions, which pass . . . my dear Mr. Semiovski!"

"They pass?"—Fritz asked, with a start. ". . . we forget them! Do you mean that?"

The magistrate shrugged his shoulders; he was getting impatient.

He put his hand on the lad's arms. His embarrassment disappeared, and he was able to resume the pathos which he made use of every day. Once more feeling confident and superior, he sat down on his chair and, striking his knee with his fist, looked up:

"Now calm yourself, man!" he said. "How can you be such a pessimist! You might as well hang yourself right away! Look here, we all of us commit sins in the juridical sense and also in the ethical sense, but we get over it. I, too, sowed my wild oats as a lad. . . . What you are saying is fantastic: it does no good either to the

individual or to society. Theoretically speaking, the enlightenment of a people has arisen from the urge of the time for the equality, the mediocrity of its types. To enlighten the people means to raise the general level, and to make it commonplace! But personalities will rise even through this—in fact, more outstanding than before, because it will be more difficult to come to the front; they will find greater obstacles in their path . . ."

A pause. Fritz was thinking.

". . . and what about the personality which is behind, under the norm?" he asked. "What am *I* to do? My personality is not a strong one, and can never lift me up beyond the general level. What am I to do?"

"You are swept along! With the collective consciousness!"

"But don't you see, sir, that there is a whole generation of young men who have been so pathologically affected by the war that collectivism will never satisfy them? It's not the war in itself that's to blame, but the loss of their youth! We feel that we exist, but that we're cut off from any peace: we've never known happiness! Nowhere, at any time, can we find rest! We can't link up with anything! We are homeless! And we are beginning to think! Ideas which you can forget, because you are quiet and secure, we can never forget. These ideas are in control of us. There is never so much fanaticism in the world as when a generation has lost its youth. One man is a fanatical communist, and another just as fanatical a reactionary, a conservative. And in my case, I can never stop thinking that we're always making ourselves guilty . . ."

The magistrate said nothing.

A pause.

Fritz had got himself under control again, and now looked up and asked, in a matter-of-fact tone, with no trace of feeling:

"What was it you wanted of me, sir? I think we've misunderstood each other . . ."

The little gentleman smiled, in a slightly embarrassed way.

"Yes," he said, in his high-pitched voice, with his eyes again on his finger-nails, but now and then suddenly glancing up. "You Russians are a peculiar people. It's difficult to get to know you. In any case, owing to the lack of evidence, we should have to let you go—that is to say, after a while; but I am going to let you out at once. We can't go on keeping you here under detention . . ." —he stopped himself from adding "unfortunately," with which he usually finished this sentence. "Do you know, Semiovski, you Russians often say things which a person who is completely absorbed in his work, like myself, simply hasn't the time to think about . . ."

Fritz smiled, and the magistrate continued:

"Well, then, don't take things so hard. This afternoon we'll put through the formalities and get you released . . ."

That afternoon Fritz Semiovski was set free. None of his acquaintances knew about it. He walked slowly away through the dimly-lit streets of the most unpleasant quarter of Berlin. When at last he reached the vicinity of the Stettiner Station it was already nearly nine o'clock. All the gas lights were burning gloomily, and the snow was soft and dirty, but it was rather cold.

He rang at the door of his lodgings; the bell was worked by a wire, and it went on ringing for a few

seconds after he had pulled. His room was on the ground floor. Through the frosted panes he could hear and see the landlady opening the door of her room and shuffling along the passage; then she switched on the light and opened the door.

His landlady was Frau Frank, a small, well-proportioned person some fifty-eight years of age, with alert, expressive features and bobbed grey hair, thick and rather tousled. She dressed in a comfortable, easy-going style which made everyone like her. She was always ready for a drink, and was very good-natured; she was firm only in money matters. She sometimes told her confidants that she came of a good Jewish family, and had been pretty in her youth; that she had been a manageress in Paris till Herr Frank, an exceptionally tall and strong seaman, had brought her with him to Berlin; then he had died, leaving her nothing but these rooms. In these dark quarters, at the back of a dilapidated house in an alley which had a doubtful reputation with the police, there used to be—so it was rumoured—a brothel on a small and comfortable scale—inexpensive and easy-going. But that was in the past. The only inexplicable thing in her history was the seaman who had lived in Paris and Berlin. But if anyone ever drew her attention to the inconsistency of a seaman whose homes were in Paris and Berlin, she would begin weeping bitterly, which she never did on any other occasion; and all her acquaintances of long standing would be careful not to rub this sore spot. Fritz was very curious to discover the solution of this mystery, and as his curiosity remained unsatisfied he grew more determined, and tried every method of gaining Frau Frank's confidence. Why, he asked himself, did this woman, who was so shrewd,

so self-reliant, and in her own way so honest, stick to this inconsistency which was bound to arouse suspicion? A seaman, and Berlin, Paris! If she had anything to hide, why did she not just refuse to answer questions or tell a more convincing lie? And then, as he was considering it, it struck him for the first time that this elderly woman, who had evidently come down in the world, was extraordinary in the way that she managed to keep her head above water. She had no one whom she loved or cared for and no one to protect her, but she was everywhere respected. Often she would sit for hours thinking of something—and then deny it if anyone caught her at it. She was a little, old woman, shrewd and active, and at the same time shabby and worn.

When she opened the door and recognised him, she nearly fell on his neck. He shielded himself from her attentions, and breaking loose from her embrace went to his room and turned on the light. No one was there—only the cold smell of cigarette smoke. The room was square and of medium size, and the air in it was blended with that familiar but almost indefinable smell of decay and tawdry elegance; a smell of something tragic, which everyone noticed who came to live here. Yellow lace curtains covered the two windows, and the dim light was subdued by a dingy red silk shade. The windows were opposite the door; there was a brown cupboard against the left-hand wall, and on the right, near the door, there was a washstand and mirror and a wooden bed with a red quilted cover. Against the right-hand wall there was a wretched sofa; and in the middle of the room, on a threadbare, colourless carpet, a table with a red woollen cloth over it, and an ash-tray; by it there were two chairs.

So he was at home.

He opened the door.

"Frau Frank . . ."

The old woman came.

"Where is Friedel? Away again?"

"Yes," said Frau Frank, "she is out. I believe she's in the café. She's been very quiet, poor thing. It's to be hoped you'll soon get a job. There was only one yesterday, and no one else all the rest of the week. And the week before she wasn't fit. She only once went to the cinema."

"Well, Mother Frank?" he asked suspiciously; he was bending forward a little, and he screwed up his eyes and looked into hers. His voice was almost threatening as he said: "Well? Nothing else?"

The old woman shook her head. He asked once more, insistently:

". . . absolutely nothing?"

"No, Fritz, by God, no! She's an honest girl, is Friedel . . ." she said, with her peculiar blend of heartiness and flippancy. She spoke to him with the familiar "Du," while he kept to the formal "Sie," or avoided any form of address. He felt embarrassed.

When she had gone, he sat down. The room was very hot.

At first it struck him that the place was extraordinarily quiet, but then he noticed that they were playing again in the neighbouring dance-hall. He had forgotten its existence. Someone was banging the piano, and a couple of squalling voices were singing some song about the Rhine, and now and then other singing and high-pitched laughter could be heard through it.

He was terribly tired, and would have liked to go to sleep—the bed was drawing him like a magnet; but that wouldn't do, because Friedel might come along with some courtier. He almost fell asleep on his chair, what with the heat, the night and the semi-darkness, and the sounds in the distance.

A great dull mirror hung over the wash-stand, over against where he was sitting; he got up, and, resting both hands on the wash-stand, held his face close to the glass.

Against the dim background he saw a pale, hard, unhappy face, with eyes wider open than anyone else's in the world. He lost all sense of his surroundings, of his present circumstances, of time.

He began to think, or rather, just to feel . . .

I have a perfectly natural desire—he decided—for a certain kind of life: cleanliness, self-respect, discipline, a social career and inward peace. When a proletarian wants peace, then the only thing for him to do is to die—that's the cheapest way to get it. Therefore I'm longing for death! Why shouldn't I die? What's the alternative? On one side of the scales, rest, rest, eternal rest; and on the other——well, what? Curiosity, to call it by its right name! What will Vassilii tell me, if I do find him? Perhaps the squire told me a lie that night, and Vassilii knows nothing at all; it may be that there's nothing at all to be known; perhaps Vassilii has been killed or has been dead a long time, or has gone mad, or has gone to America; perhaps. . . . What is keeping me from death is the fear of once more missing something which might be of some help to me.

And why have I any desire to know that great secret? Does it concern me in any way? And if it does, am I so

particularly interested in it? Did I ever really love my parents? I only loved them because I lost them—and everyone really loves only what he has lost . . .

There had already been many occasions such as this, when he would think over his position and talk aloud to himself, remaining quite oblivious of pain or of any interruption—monologues, in which he was always dealing with the same theme. There was one occasion when this happened in very awkward circumstances, and the people had sent Fritz to a psycho-analyst. The latter used a scientific term to describe Fritz's condition; he managed to cure him of the attacks for a time, but he did not succeed in altogether suppressing them. The patient's make-up was carefully examined during the treatment, and the record showed that he was in a morbid pathological condition, such as is generally found only in people who are over-absorbed in mental work. Of course in the juridical sense he was fully responsible for his actions.

According to the psycho-analyst, he had a suggestible and suggestive nature—a gift of fantastic combination, which was not always logical, though always worked out to the end; and although he was energetic, his mental outlook was pessimistic, probably owing to inheritance reinforced by depressing experiences in his childhood. So much for the analysis, or at least the part of it which was intelligible to laymen, with the addition of one further point showing the influence of what he had been through on his so-called pessimistic mental outlook.

He was only slightly different from normal men, and in fact only in one respect: the interest and determination which most people concentrate on their profession or their family were in his case centred on seeking the

solution of his strange experiences. When he had succeeded in finding Vassilii he would no doubt have been able to settle down to some occupation or to found a family. His fixed idea that he must find Vassilii, and with Vassilii some tremendous secret, had first developed in his mind at a time of extreme mental stress; and during the period when he had been wandering, homeless and friendless, it had become the one definite point in his life, the only intimate and friendly thing he knew. It had become *his* secret, and the more people tried to discover it the more determined he was to hide it, and the stronger its hold on him. But sometimes he was overwhelmed by another idea, which arose out of the first idea and troubled him sorely: considering his life objectively, he had a terrible sense of despair, of eternal guilt.

He was searching for Vassilii; first he had wandered round in Berlin for weeks and months; he had been to information bureaux, to gatherings of Russians, to the Russian and Polish newspaper offices; from time to time he would think that he recognised either Vassilii or Sossia; casual jobs brought him a poor and insecure livelihood; and when he found that work took up too much time, he would live on some girl; most of the time he was wandering about the streets, always on the lookout.

By degrees Vassilii had turned into an idea, an ideal which a man can believe in and even strive to secure, but which he no longer really expects to attain. The road leading to the ideal is the most important thing about the ideal itself. And it was on this point that Feodor, now Fritz Semiovski, was entirely concentrated. As the priest had once said to him:

"You must seek truth!"

Feodor: "Then shall I find it?"

The Priest: "No, Feodor!"

Feodor: "Why, then, should I seek it?"

The Priest: "But is it worth while to seek something that you can find . . . ?"

When Fritz came to himself with a start it was nearly eleven. Friedel had not yet come, so it must mean that she had someone in tow. It was very irritating: it would be late before he could get any sleep.

He picked up his cap, called to Frau Frank: "I'm going out again!"—and walked out.

The alley was slippery and almost pitch dark; there was a street lamp, but it was almost out. Two policemen were walking slowly along in the distance.

Fritz stepped out, with his hands in his pockets and his coat-collar turned up; it was very cold. Just before he reached the dance-saloon he turned his collar down again, and then he walked in. It was like walking into a warm mist compounded of music, tobacco, wine, talking, laughter and the clatter of plates; his ears felt hot, and they tickled.

The hall was small, hot and red. The general effect was pretty, but the details were dingy. It was only with closed eyes that the whole atmosphere could be appreciated: a murmur of tender, sentimental music, soft, gliding feet, and muffled snatches of words, caressing, vibrating. Behind a yellow curtain an old waiter was sitting motionless.

Fritz had eight weeks of prison behind him; it had given him a chance to rest and reflect. Now he looked at everything with as much interest as if this had been his first visit to the place. He had thought that he knew this

hall, because he had been here hundreds of times before; but now he realised that he hardly knew it at all, and he looked round at it, not to see what he remembered, but because so many things suddenly caught his attention.

He looked round; there was no sign of Friedel. A waiter—young, smooth-chinned, fair, but already with many teeth missing—came by, and told him that Fräulein Friedel was in the bar. Fritz thanked him politely, sat down at a table and ordered a glass of brandy. He made up his mind to wait for Friedel, and meanwhile he went on carefully observing the room.

Six by eight metres of dirty red linoleum, with a brass edging—that was where they were dancing. Round it there was a red carpet, two metres wide, and on it, at both sides of the dance floor, were tables. At one end there was a wide open space, also filled with tables, brilliantly illuminated; and at the other end, opposite, the band was seated on a low dais, in a kind of niche. A brass trellis, breast-high, separated the band from the dance floor. There were four musicians; Fritz knew them well—in winter they were called "The Melody Four"; in summer, "Le Tremblay Trio," because one of them was always ill in summer—there was something wrong with his lungs; and on special patriotic evenings they were known as "The Four Hurrahs."

Fritz saw that right behind them, in the far wall of the niche where they were sitting, there was a small, grey window, which no one ever bothered about; it was blurred with the heat, and it was never cleaned; the iron bars outside threw shadows across it. No one ever looked out or in through it. Fritz thought to himself that if the Messiah were to come along and stand outside the

window and look in, flattening his nose against the glass —then perhaps the band might play a hymn. They would dance the slow, voluptuous dance, the tango, to a hymn tune . . .

The lighting was soft and bright; the tired faces of the prostitutes gained an attractive charm from the shadows cast by the magical light effects, which the boy Karl was working with his dirty fingers, from behind the yellow curtain where the old waiter was still sitting motionless. "How wonderful!"—Fritz thought—"the old women stop growing old when the red light is on them, and when they smile, they are young! And the midinettes, who feel like silk, how beautiful they are!—and now it's the Blues, and the light turns pink, and when the light is pink they all dance in silence; they like to dream of their ideals, and they feel solemn and melancholy."

Now the lights came on again; the waiter flew past, taking a curve like an aeroplane. People began to talk again.

There was an interval. A cavalier from a shop asked his companion: "What will you drink?" They were quite near Fritz, and he heard her answer in a matter-of-fact tone: "Champagne Cup!"—that was the speciality of the saloon.

Fritz thought that after six months the young man would no longer be asking what she would have, but would just order two beers—"Kugel, light"—that is the cheapest. At first they are goddesses, these little girls—when they come to beer men are tired of them already, and they too are tired . . .

Fritz thought: people in a town are actually never alone; but how lonely they must be!

The music started again.

Opposite to him Bertha was sitting; she was an old, comfortable prostitute. Once he had been drunk, and had intended to go off with her; when he tried to embrace her, he noticed that she had one wooden arm.

Fritz considered the four members of the band.

The leader was a black sheep from a good family; he was perhaps forty years old, with a smooth, well-fed, expressive face, black hair and beard. He looked a little like some film actor; he had an ill-fitting dinner-jacket; he was as smooth as an eel, very pale, and his manners were excellent, but he was very nervous. His father was a rich market-gardener, a man with uncouth ways and an impressive voice at market-gardening congresses. The son had begun to learn the trade in a garden near the Bodensee, and then, seduced by his own conceit, by visits to the cinema and by admirers of his charms, he had rebelled against his teacher. He ran away—and ran off the rails. He was always a jolly companion; people were always glad to see him, and no one ever trusted him. He tried several trades, and on several occasions his family had helped him, but in the end they cut him off. He was brimming over with ambition and ideals, but unfortunately he was a weakling. He once had a lover—a quiet, gentle girl, who might have made something of him; but she was of good family, and she gave him up. His name was Erich, and he was the leader of a band. What had he achieved? Fritz reflected.

The drummer, who also played the 'cello, was shrivelled in face, in stature and in soul. His flights of fancy were brief, his ambition small, his desires immense. He was

always peevish, almost morose, because people did not make him the central figure; but nevertheless he was reliable, respectable, and a brilliant mathematician. His horn-spectacles overshadowed a fine forehead; when he sang, he listened critically, as a musician, to his own voice, and he wrinkled up his forehead. His imagination had never yet made a jump. He was a permanent bachelor, very tidy, and faithful girls placed their reliance on him; he was weak only when he was drunk. His parents were small peasants in Brandenburg. As a matter of course he subordinated himself to circumstances in general, and to the leader of the band in particular. He saw the couples dancing in front of him, and for the last ten years he had been shaking his head over "those young people."

The man who played the saxophone had an incredibly wide mouth, which gave the impression that but for his ears it would have gone right round his head; his curly hair was a dirty yellow, and there were kindly furrows in his face; he always felt melancholy when he was playing sentimental airs. It was obvious from his hands and his wedding ring, and the way he spread out his short legs, that he was a respectable citizen with a comfortable and dependable outlook on life. His beer was dearer to him than champagne. He had grown used to his wife, and they got on well together, though he would often have liked to go off with some of the little, slim girls he saw. He was conscientious and kindly, and grew excited only over politics and moral questions affecting other people; his inner life was entirely guided by convention and the accepted code of manners.

The piano was played by a dark, smooth-chinned youth

of about twenty years of age. He loved music, and from up in the gallery he had soaked in Wagner's operas hundreds of times over. His people, who were very hard-working, had urged on him that it was high time he earned some money, and now he was playing the piano, with some talent, in this saloon. He was still very young in all his ways; he tilted his head sideways when he spoke, and played with emotion. As he was the youngest, he had to keep his thoughts to himself. In his free time he played classical music; and sometimes he played the drum, when his sister was giving a dance. The other musicians paid little heed to him; and in fact he was not particularly important. He was very much in love with his girl friend, and she put up with him. He was wearing himself out for her, and was doomed to be very unhappy; his lungs were not sound, and his fingers were colourless. He had no friends, and he found no consolation in his job. On holidays he would often go into other halls and, sitting silent and motionless, consume a glass of beer while he observed the band and especially the pianist: to see how *that man* did it. But Fritz thought—in reality his miserable soul only wanted to know how that man managed to endure it . . .

The waiter brought Fritz his brandy.

At that moment Friedel came out of some door or other, and a man was with her. Fritz recognised him at once: he was the clerk from the examining magistrate's office, the tall fellow with the dragging footsteps; he was thin, perhaps forty years old, with fair, stubbly hair. Friedel had her arm through his.

For a moment Fritz felt suspicious, and he turned pale.

Were the court people using these means to track him down?

But he immediately dismissed the idea. If they really were tracking him, they would not use this man, whom he would be sure to recognise; moreover, he was already half drunk and hiccupping all the time. But in any case Fritz thought it better not to let the man see him; and so he would have to postpone meeting Friedel again, which was a pity, for he was very fond of her. He was conservative in his likings; it is true that he did not love her, but she was always there for him, and during his imprisonment he had constantly longed for her.

Friedel was a tall, rather plump girl, with black hair cut in a fringe. She was serious and docile, and always trying to be considerate; she laughed very little, and always in an embarrassed way—she had preserved this embarrassed shyness, because men liked it. She was not regarded as an out-and-out prostitute. She was twenty-two years of age, and had grown up as an orphan in the Scheunen quarter, though curiously enough she did not speak the Berlin dialect. Her caresses were shy and almost defensive; but when anyone possessed her for the first time she was excited and unrestrained, though she would have nothing to do with any perversion. She never talked of money, and her shy tact appealed to many men, although she did not realise it. She insisted on other people being tidy, but she herself was rather untidy.

She sat down at a table near the dance floor; Fritz was four tables behind her, near a couple of lovers who practically hid him from sight. She and her cavalier had their backs turned towards him, and he was able to examine them closely.

She was wearing a black dress, made of some kind of silk; the back was simple and close-fitting. She had fastened a bright scarf round her neck, so that it made a triangle, with the point downwards. The scarf, which was evidently silk, had four great red spots on a dark grey background; it was very pretty, and it suited her. Before he went to prison Friedel had not yet possessed this scarf; it grieved him to realise that, and he almost felt like crying. How stupid this crying was. Tears rose in his eyes on every possible occasion. Sometimes people poked fun at him because of it, but then he would grow wild, and hit all round him. In this district he was officially known as "Fritz the Russian," but among themselves they often spoke of him as "Fritz the Weeper."

Friedel, who was sitting on her gentleman's right, had laid her left hand quietly on the clerk's right knee. Fritz saw how this restful, intimate touch of her warm hand was exciting the clerk, while Friedel seemed not to notice it and in fact probably was not thinking about it. Every prostitute in the world knows that only an accidental, brief contact can excite strange men; the fleeting touch of her dress, the gentle pressure of her knee, her hand stroking his arm—they know it instinctively. But how did Friedel know that the restful touch of a girl's hand could make this old clerk so helpless that his watery eyes could do nothing but stare and stare, and he forgot his official manner. How did she know? Now she was smiling at him; her full, almost thick lips were painted blood-red, and her teeth showed. The blood mounted to Fritz's head. He had been eight weeks in solitary confinement, and he wanted to go to her . . .

He mastered his feelings, signed to the waiter, paid his

bill and stood up; they did not notice him. He looked round when he reached the door—they were dancing again, and "the Malay" had just asked Clara to dance. "The Malay" was a mild Japanese with the face of a boy, who came here every couple of weeks and picked up a girl. The girls knew that he paid well; but first he wanted to dance, without intermission, for hours, quite slowly and gently, without a word.

Fritz went out; it seemed to have got even colder; half numb with cold, he raced round the streets, and then went into the waiting-room at the Stettiner Station. He waited there till two; at half-past two the inspectors would come round, and he had to clear out before then. He went slowly homewards. From outside he saw that there was a light in the room, and so the courtier must have gone—Friedel always put out the light when there was anyone there.

He opened the door of the passage, and closed it behind him slowly and carefully. Then he groped his way along the passage, opened the door of the room and shut it. It was warm and quiet in there.

Friedel had heard from Frau Frank that he was back. She was waiting for him, sitting in a chair and reading a book. She was fully clad, and the bed was made, and the washstand-jug had been freshly filled; she knew he liked things like that, though he had never told her so.

She jumped up when she saw him, and fell on his neck; he felt her firm, warm body against his. She flung her arms tightly round him, and put her soft cheek against his hard, unshaven face.

". . . you're here again . . . !"—she murmured embarrassed at the jubilation in her voice. Fritz felt a

friendly, homely sensation.

"My little child!"—he said to her tenderly; she was taller than he was, and she literally had to bend down to him.

Soon he undressed her, with trembling hands. She smiled, as usual, in an embarrassed way; there's something strange about this kind of girl, he thought.

When they had been lying in bed quite a long while—two or three hours later—she was sleeping uneasily, and the light was out, but he was still quite awake; his eyes were open, and he was thinking. All of a sudden he noticed new sounds, other than those to which he had been listening; the door next to his was closed, and light showed under the cupboard.

Behind the cupboard there was a locked door, leading to Adolf's room; when he heard the next door shut Fritz realised that it must be Adolf who was still lodging there.

Adolf had a profession which no one ever mentioned; he was a tall, stout man with brown velveteen clothes and gaiters of a reddish hue. His face was red and puffy; his head was as round as a ball, much too small for the body under it, and there was almost no neck. His eyebrows were pale in colour, and the whole effect was of a baby's face with a menacing expression. He earned his living by means of stamps at the Labour Exchange, combined with robberies; but in every way he was organised, and at that time he was politically a convinced National Socialist. Unfortunately even they did not have any great confidence in him, in spite of his watery eyes; many of them suspected that he was a Communist spy. He was an uncouth fellow, who was not much of a talker; but if he could not talk as quickly as he would have liked, nevertheless his eyes

blinked out in advance what he was trying to say, and the effect was extremely unpleasant. For the rest, he was homeless, friendless, morose and cruel. And why not?—he often asked himself.

Fritz, lying there in bed, suddenly thought of something. He got up softly, pulled something on, and went across to the other room.

"Well, so you're here again!"—said Adolf casually.

They drank a couple of schnaps together.

"I say," Fritz asked, "do you by chance know a Russian that I'm trying to find—you know such a lot of people! He used to be called Vassilii, and he's probably living with some Poles. His girl was called Sossia. A funny name, isn't it?"—and he described them.

Adolf's face grew spiteful and perplexed.

"Nay, I don't know them." He drew a deep breath and got on his feet. "And let me tell you something, my lad: I'm not a spy, not by a long chalk. Have they been talking you round at the Alexanderplatz? You're to do a little spying on us, hey?" His eyes blinked.

". . . I've always put up with you, although you're only a damned Russian; but if you come it again like that, I'll have to tell my pals and give you one in the jaw!"

Fritz tried all his eloquence to persuade Adolf that he was not a spy, and by degrees Adolf began to believe him. In the end Fritz learned that a Russian who had a name something like that had been wanted by the police for some days now on a charge of robbery with violence; the notices were up everywhere. That was the reason why Adolf had been so suspicious; he always carried police notices in his head—they were the only things he read; he would stand for hours at the Central Police

Office on the Alexanderplatz reading the notices, and while he was doing it he would exchange greetings with every policeman he saw. All sorts of strange things were told about Adolf. For example, he often wore spectacles with black rims, which he had got from somewhere or other: no one knew where their former owner was now languishing, and everyone suspected Adolf. In the circles in which he moved no one trusts a man who speaks little and drinks little; and Adolf was a man like that.

Fritz went back to his room and lay down again by Friedel. As he lay still there and suddenly felt her warm body, he began to think about her, and tears came into his eyes again. He went on crying noiselessly and uncontrollably, for a long time, and then he suddenly woke her up, kissed her ear and embraced her. Drunk with sleep, she put her arms round him and her thick, strong arms pulled him to her with all her strength . . .

It was about this time that detectives were posted at the Hamburger station on the look-out for Vassilii Lidin, who it was thought would come there. Unfortunately the police are not so badly organised, nor are they themselves so stupid as one might suppose from detective stories or their regulation of traffic in large cities. They had known all about Vassilii's life history and his habits for a long time; they knew all about him, at least in so far as his life in Germany was concerned.

He had been taken prisoner right at the beginning of the war; he was one of the first Russians who had been captured, half dead with cold; later on people began to think it had not been accidental, but that he had seized the first opportunity of getting himself captured.

"Love of the Fatherland is all very well for fine officers; God doesn't give me permission to kill people"—so he had explained to the interpreter when he was brought into the German lines. He was sent to the prisoners of war camp at Sennelager; like all Russians, he was industrious, docile and clever at languages, and so they taught him to read and write. One day he disappeared, and although they knew that he had gone towards the Eastern front, nothing more was heard of him until the end of 1917, after the end of hostilities, in Warsaw, when the German Army was withdrawing. A deposition was taken in which Vassilii, completely friendless and in rags, stated that a girl from his home village was supposed to have been living with some of her family near Warsaw. It was for her sake that he had got himself sent to the war and allowed himself to be captured; it was for her sake he had worked and studied; and it was for her sake that he had escaped from the Sennelager camp and after endless difficulties, at last, only a few days before, reached Warsaw. But it was only to learn that the girl, who had actually been living there, had now gone off to Berlin—where else?—with her relatives, her uncle and aunt. The soldiers were sympathetic, and they took him back with them—one more made no difference—for the soldiers were feeling gentle and happy at the prospect of soon being at home again. So they took him with them, sticking him away somewhere, and at last he reached Berlin. In Berlin he disappeared.

Sossia!

He had nothing to remind him of her—no scarf, no ring, no kerchief—not even a scar on his face from her teeth—nothing at all.

As he only had a limited knowledge of German, and as he was still what he had always been—a servant, always thinking himself inferior to everyone he came across—many people were able to make use of him for their own ends. There was one such man in particular—a man who was said to have been at one time a quack doctor; he was known as Mussolini, because he was not only domineering, but really made other people obey him. This man made Vassilii his slave. They shared a room in the Ackerstrasse; "Mussolini" slept in the bed, and Vassilii on the thin mat by the bedside. When the sun was shining, it shone first on the mat, and that made Vassilii feel happy; but when he began to realise how pleased he was, he felt ashamed of it: he thought—"Mussolini does so much for me!"—and he felt like lifting up the sun from the mat and putting it on the bed. Vassilii was often arrested by the police. Sometimes they would let him go, because the magistrates regarded him as a stupid and harmless person, and because they suspected that there was someone bigger behind him. Each time, with tears in his eyes, he would promise to turn over a new leaf; and on the next occasion when Mussolini gave his orders, Vassilii would touch him gently and apologetically on his sleeve.

"What's the matter?"—Mussolini asked in an irritated and impatient voice.

Vassilii then stuttered something about God's eyes seeing everything, and about his own promise to keep straight. Mussolini interrupted him and told him brusquely that he had no time for that sort of thing, and that his—Vassilii's—business was to keep his mouth shut and do as he was told. Then Vassilii gave a low sigh,

and thought to himself: "It's time I found Sossia. So many sins! So many sins!"—and then he kept his mouth shut, did as he was told, and was regularly picked up by the police.

"In God's name!"—he said, when they caught him—"God saw it."

One December evening he was standing with Adolf in front of a theatre in the lower Kurfürstendamm. When a particular whistle sounded, Adolf was to trip him up, and he was to tumble down with Adolf on top of him, and then they were to go all out at each other: "there must be some blood about," Mussolini had ordered; "a tooth must get knocked out, or someone's nose must be bleeding, so that they think it's a real fight!" Then, while a crowd gathered round them, Mussolini and his pals were to push their way in among the people and lighten their pockets. Vassilii saw that it was quite a good plan; he was constantly wavering between his appreciation of cunning and his fear of God.

So Adolf and Vassilii stood there, right opposite the theatre. They were stamping their feet, because it was very cold, and the waiting began to get boring. Motors with flashing lights pulled up, with screeching brakes or noiselessly, just in front of them; ladies in bright or dark fur coats stepped out of them, their thin silk stockings gleaming; their warm, scented smell reached the two where they were standing waiting for the whistle. They were terribly cold, and they stood there, bored and weary.

". . . some blood . . ."

If only the time had come for it! This cold was intolerable.

Two women came along. Vassilii noticed them only

when they had already passed, and he did not pay any attention to them until he heard a fragment of a sentence in Russian—". . . to-morrow, to Hamburg, a lot of money . . ."

Good God! That voice!

That was Sossia!

. . . he must go after her—he turned to go, his brain reeling with excitement. Then the whistle sounded, but he did not hear it; he was running after the woman—only two yards more—only one yard, and then he would be up to them. He tried to call out "Sossia!"—but just at that moment a dark, thick leg tripped him up, and he fell heavily.

That word that he had been trying to say was now drowned in blood—he had bitten his tongue. He gasped out to Adolf—in Russian, he was so excited—"let me go, by Christ!" But Adolf was on top of him like a mountain, hitting him in the neck. Vassilii remembered: ". . . oh God, these were our orders . . ."

Adolf was hitting him savagely; but he caught a glimpse of Mussolini's face in front of him—his eyes were small and evil-looking, and his mop of hair was hanging down over his face. He thought to himself: "The squire! The squire!"—and he began to defend himself wildly; in his rage and pain he thrust his thumbs brutally into the eyes of the fellow who was squatting across him like a bridge. They both went over, struggling, rolling, hitting, biting, groaning . . .

Policemen pulled them apart, but it was not an easy job; and then they had to hold them back from each other, as the moment they saw each other they began to hit out, without a word. The instruction which they had been

given to hit each other was entirely forgotten; the fight had become a real battle. At the police station their names were taken and then they were let out at different times.

By the time Vassilii was standing once more in the cold, dark street, all his anger had gone. He tried to think things out.

He went back to the Kurfürstendamm and walked slowly from one end to the other, on both sides, peering into every woman's face in a way he would never have dared to do before. He had a feeling of elation: "Perhaps for once there'll have been a miracle! Time will have stood still! It might happen!"—he thought—"and then she'd still be there!"

The sound of her voice was still ringing in his ears—a low, faint sound, which filled him with excitement. It was guttural—deep in her throat—just a couple of words. From time to time he would imagine that he saw her in the distance; and then he fell to picturing to himself what it would be like if he did really find her.

"Little pigeon!" he would say, and he would go down on his knees to her, here on the Kurfürstendamm; he would take her hand, and he would say: "We men are so weak! We can't help ourselves! Help me, Madonna, I've been searching for you for eight long years . . . !"

He went on walking round and round until all his limbs were hurting, and then he turned to go home, with a terrible idea in his head. The moon was shining brightly. Mussolini was asleep, and woke up as he came in.

"Well, are you here at last?" he asked, and fell asleep again without waiting for an answer.

Vassilii's heart was beating hard; he did not lie down

on the mat, but waited until Mussolini's regular breathing showed that he was asleep. His eyes were tight shut, and the moonlight was resting on his smooth-shaven, bony cheek. His lips were thin and tightly closed, like an old maid's.

Slowly Vassilii raised his hand; he saw the breath coming out of his own mouth, quite clearly visible, like steam. He was still terrified that Mussolini might be deceiving him—that he was not really asleep, and that he would open his eyes the very next instant—then all would be lost, and he would crumple up like an empty sack.

But on this occasion Mussolini was not deceiving him: he was really asleep. Vassilii's hand sank lower, still lower, till suddenly the tips of his fingers touched the man's neck. Then Mussolini opened his eyes, but it was already too late—it was all over before he was properly awake. Vassilii pressed his nails and the hard tips of his fingers into the veins; Mussolini's face grew swollen and dark, and even the moon went out. A groan sounded through the room, and then there was only darkness.

Vassilii relaxed his grip; he had to pull his fingers out, and they hurt horribly. He felt under the pillow and pulled out the familiar pocket-book. As he did so a few notes fell out of it, but he did not heed them; he went softly out of the room, down the dark, creaking stairs and out into the street.

He walked about for half an hour, and then he rang at Frau Frank's door and asked whether Adolf was there. Yes, Adolf was there; he was ill in bed, Frau Frank told him. Vassilii went in, and Adolf looked up with surprise. Vassilii knew that it was not necessary to prove his com-

radely spirit in words: only money could do it. Adolf was a miser; he saved every pfennig, and was ready to betray or to kill people, all for the sake of a secret ideal of his. No one dared to chaff him about it; his ambition was to buy a grocery store—that was his dream: . . . thin sliced ham, certainly, madam . . . clean white aprons flitting about . . . yes, madam, in a moment, madam—a packet of soap; a quarter of liver sausage—thank you, madam . . .

"I'm going away, Adolf," Vassilii said, "to Hamburg; my girl lives there. You're just as miserable a wretch as I am—you've got as little as I have—and you didn't do it, anyway!"

He did not say what Adolf hadn't done, but took the wallet from his pocket, counted out half the notes and gave them to him. Adolf's eyes dilated, but he said nothing.

"May God preserve your immortal soul!"—Vassilii said, quite solemnly. The door closed; Adolf was alone.

Vassilii went to the Lehrter Station, bought a ticket, and waited till a train came in.

He got a corner seat, and fell asleep as soon as he sat down; when he woke up it was still night, and he looked round him.

It was a square fourth-class compartment; in the dim light he could see men with caps and women with shawls and no hats, lolling back, leaning against each other's shoulders. Among them there was a fair-haired student with thick, rimless glasses; his head was thrown back, his neck was projecting, and his mouth was open. There

were also a few people lying on the floor on sacks, among some baskets.

There were twenty people in this tiny space. The light was burning dimly. There were Polish women sitting on some baskets; their eyes were open—Sossia was not among them. A bare-kneed lad, evidently a member of the Wandervogel League, was huddled up in a corner. The train rattled on; it was still night. By Vassilii's side on the wooden seat there were a young woman and a man with tired, despairing faces; each of them was thinking that the other smelt of sweat. The men with the caps woke up and exchanged a few low, hurried whispers; then one of them pulled a mouth-organ from his pocket. The train rolled on, with a leaden, monotonous sound; the gas light got dimmer and dimmer. Vassilii thought to himself that the people there reeked of poverty.

The fellow with the mouth-organ played a soft, melancholy tune; the women with the shawls woke up.

Vassilii thought to himself: the good God will take care of me; and Mussolini will no longer be leading people into evil ways and ordering them to do evil things. He will no longer be able to order two people to attack each other like wolves: I pressed my thumbs into his eyes, and he hit me in the mouth—good God!

Then he muttered to himself in a low voice: ". . . is it right for a man to lead others into evil ways . . ." No one took any notice.

Suddenly, for the first time in his life, he got toothache; Adolf must have driven his teeth in. The pain was so violent that he lost control of himself and began to moan. It got worse and worse; it felt like someone boring with a thin wire through his brain, his nose, his ears and his

whole head. He felt that something with a sharp point was sticking into his head in a tender part, and that the pain would stop if he could only draw it out. But he could not find the sharp point or the tender spot; they seemed to be everywhere. The pain was driving him crazy, and he began to cry softly; then, when the mouth-organ stopped for a moment, his groans sounded loudly through the compartment. He had lost all control, and was pressing his cheek alternately against the cold glass window-pane and against his warm hands. But nothing seemed to help. Once the thought struck him that he was a murderer—and then he thought: "A murderer with toothache!" and he almost laughed.

Now the people began to notice him; it was gradually beginning to grow light. They stirred and woke up after a struggle, with burning, half-shut eyes, hot hands and dry mouths; and each of them recommended him to try some new remedy. Vassilii tried whatever was suggested, but nothing brought any relief.

Then he screamed with pain.

The boy with the bare knees—an undersized, fair-haired lad—then woke up too, and gave him a tablet which had a marvellous effect. In the meanwhile it had grown a little lighter, and it was possible to distinguish woods, fields and lakes. Overflowing with gratitude to the boy, Vassilii went over to him and sat down by him; he was from Saxony, and his name was Schubert. Vassilii was so pleased that his teeth had stopped aching that he felt like embracing the lad, and he invited him to be his guest in Hamburg. The proposal was gladly accepted.

It was not yet quite daylight, and a few flakes of snow were beginning to fall when the train arrived at the

Central Station in Hamburg. When the doors were opened and the fresh air came in, they noticed how musty and sweaty, how close and hot it had been in their compartment.

Vassilii and Schubert drank some coffee in the waiting-room, and then they went out into the town.

In the evening, when they were passing a police-station, Vassilii recognised a placard describing him as wanted. "One moment," he said, and stopped to read it. Schubert went slowly on. Vassilii had simply forgotten the whole business, and even now it hardly entered his head that they might arrest him for what he had done or punish him in any way. He read that Mussolini was not really dead; that was a pity, but again it did not matter so very much: the whole business seemed to him to belong to a hundred years ago.

But who had betrayed him, that they were after him with that placard?

During the following day Vassilii hung about in the station, hoping to meet Sossia, but she did not come. Some policemen were standing there, keeping a watch on all the Berlin train arrivals, for Vassilii was expected to be coming to Hamburg. They stood alongside of him with a photograph in their hands, and compared it with everyone who arrived.

But Sossia had travelled to Altona, and so Vassilii's watch was in vain, and in the evening he returned to his friend Schubert, who in the meantime had booked a room for them both. The room was in the Spielbudenplatz, in the St. Pauli district; there was no heating, and the carpet was torn to shreds; it was only five marks a week for the

two of them—that was money enough. Vassilii paid the landlady, who was a quiet, tall old lady with a slight stoop, ten marks for two weeks in advance. Then he threw himself on the bed without a word and went to sleep for the first time since his exciting adventures of the last few days.

"But who, in Christ's name, who betrayed me?" he reflected, without any trace of anger in his mind; and then he fell asleep.

In the vicinity of the Stettiner Station in Berlin people were also whispering to each other: "Who betrayed Vassilii?" Men with caps and smooth cheeks, their hands in their pockets, were standing in front of the Labour Exchange waiting to draw their unemployment pay—the tax paid by the State to its step-children. They were all discussing the Vassilii affair; they were all astonished that he had been so quickly marked down as the man who had done it; solidarity was the watchword of the hour—they had picked it up from the political party speakers.

At about half-past eight in the morning—it was still dark—Frau Frank arrived and stood among them. She had come to fetch the money for her son Edgar, because he was ill; in reality there was no such person, as he had died when he was a little child; but Frau Frank kept him alive, for the sake of his bread cards during the war and his unemployment pay now. So she stood there among the crowd, and listened to what was being said; they spoke quite freely in front of her, as no one suspected her of any treachery.

A few street lamps were blinking through the fog, which had followed the previous night's frost. The men

were speaking in low tones, and their breath rose like steam. The courtyard was narrow, and they formed a long queue.

An old man came dragging along; he was supernaturally thin and there were red patches on his cheeks. He was a bill-poster; everyone trusted him, because for the last forty years he had been supposed to be going to die of consumption—he was always bound to die within the next month. People who are soon going to die of consumption are always liked in these circles; they are regarded as the only really good men; Papa Methuselah was that sort of man. He was also the only man who was allowed to spend the night in any waiting-room in East Berlin; he was known to all the police, and they exchanged greetings with him.

". . . morning, children!" he said in a friendly voice.

They looked up, and were glad to see his smiling, friendly face on this cold, gloomy morning; it seemed to warm them up. The old man put down his pot of paste, took out one of the posters which he was carrying in a bundle, and was about to stick it up on the notice board.

"Let me do it for you! Don't make your fingers sticky!"

One of the men took the paste-brush from him and began to dab it on the notice-board—the others did not usually see him working, and they cheered loudly—then he put up the notice on the board, and brushed it smooth with the wet brush.

"That's it!" he said, taking a step backwards so that he could read it; the old man had thrust his thin fingers into his pockets, and looked on with a smile while the other man did his work.

"That's it!" the latter repeated, looking admiringly at

his handiwork; but then the comedy of the situation struck him: he had stuck up a police "wanted" notice!

"Well, Papa Methuselah," he said, "I've as good as stuck myself on the wall!"

The other fellows guffawed at the joke; the feeling of depression was gone, and they were all laughing. A photograph of Vassilii was on the notice. The old man grinned in a friendly way, although he did not know what it was all about. They all crowded round the notice, and one of them read out, in a low voice:

"ROBBERY WITH VIOLENCE!

"On Dec. 18th, at 9 a.m., Niklas Frank, known as 'Mussolini,' 58 years of age, no occupation, was found unconscious in his room at Frau Kraft's, Ackerstrasse 53, third floor. Marks on his throat showed that someone had tried to strangle him. A large sum of money was said to be missing; no explanation has been given of how the money came to be there. The robber is believed to have been Vassilii Lidin, a casual worker who has served several terms of imprisonment. His photograph is printed below. Lidin has disappeared, and it is believed that he is either in Hamburg or on his way there. A warrant has been issued for his arrest. His description is as follows . . ."

He read it all out, including the date and signature. When he had finished there was a dead silence. Finally someone asked: who could have betrayed Vassilii? Mussolini? That was not likely; he was still in the infirmary, unfit for any investigation by the police. All of them standing round felt that an outrage had been committed; a wave of suspicion swept through them, and each one

glanced at the others. Papa Methuselah hobbled off, still smiling his kindly smile; his paste-bucket creaked in rhythm with his shuffling steps.

The men were speaking among themselves in excited, threatening tones; only Frau Frank was still standing in front of the notice-board.

". . . Niklas Frank, known as Mussolini . . ."

Niklas Frank! Were there two people in the world with that name? Her heart seemed to stop beating; it began to hurt her terribly.

"Mussolini!" She had heard the nickname hundreds of times, and had often been told of this man's doings and peculiarities . . . and he was—Niklas Frank! . . .

No one noticed her as she went off along the street, now lit with the grey light of morning. The suffocating, cramped feeling of the immense town was crushing her down like a gigantic boulder. In a great town people lived in dark, cramped houses round courtyards; and between the stones in the courtyards there was grass showing—that was their park. And all round the courtyard there were houses like gigantic walls, and up above a piece of sky showed: a hole, with washing swinging across it . . .

A great town! Houses and houses and houses built of stone, gradually turning black with the smoke from the chimneys and the manifold dark vapours of the streets. On all sides stone; ten thousand blocks of houses filled with hot breath and faint murmurings; houses by the thousand and the hundred thousand, with pallid women, and men with caps who shun the police; and asphalt, everywhere asphalt . . . The town is gigantic; no one knows anything of the other people who are breathing the

same air as he is; people live as neighbours and do not understand each other even though they are constantly seeing each other. People pass each other and exchange glances; and their lives never meet. Oh, this wilderness of stone! How grey and cruel it was! How it weighed down one's heart!

She hurried along, now and then running, stumbling, checking herself; nearly falling into a motor that shot past like a grey ghost in the December fog. One street more, and then she had reached home! She went in; it was all dark, and except for a few sharp sounds it was all quiet—the cry of a child; the slamming of a door; a deep male voice; a woman's enticing, deep-throated laugh; the ringing sound of glass breaking somewhere; the slamming of another door, and someone running down the stairs . . .

Frau Frank had reached her own apartments; she locked the door, and went into her own room.

If he's not yet fit—she thought, quite calmly and rationally—then I can't go to him. Besides, it's too early yet; it's still quite dark. This afternoon!

She had a sudden idea; she went into the kitchen and warmed some water. Then she brushed her teeth, zealously and with much devotion; and all the time she was crying, the poor old woman. It was nineteen years since she had brushed her teeth—". . . I'm doing it for him," she thought, "—Niklas Frank!"

Adolf was still asleep, and so was the South American who lived in the third room. Everything was quiet. The only sound was from Fritz's room—someone was washing. Frau Frank knocked softly at the door and then went in. Fritz was standing by the washstand combing

his hair, and Friedel was still in bed asleep. Fritz put his finger up to his mouth and pointed to the bed, to tell her that she should not make a noise. Frau Frank thought: "He's a good fellow, is Fritz." She signed to him to come to her room, and then she went out.

He did not follow her immediately; first he carefully combed his hair; then he put on his coat and waistcoat and went to the cupboard. He had been waiting for this for a long time. He pulled out a trunk and opened it. There lay a small shoe which had once been yellow, but was now only spotted with brown. He looked at it, and tears came into his eyes; he took it out, locked the trunk again, and put the shoe on the sofa, which at other times was used for love-making. There was a cushion on the sofa, covered with blue velvet, with bright yellow and pink spots on it. These spots were flowers, and one of them looked like a girl's head without a nose, wearing a great yellow straw hat . . . it must be summer where that girl was, but here it was winter.

Standing here he could see himself in the mirror. It was still dark—here it was always dark—but still he could see himself as a vague, moving shadow: a head and two eyes. Then suddenly he noticed with a terrible start that in the mirror his right eye was his left. It was not just that it seemed to be: it *was* so!

He grew quite perplexed; it is certainly very peculiar, he thought. So I'm not at all the person that I see in the glass! And everyone sees me differently from how I see myself! And it occurred to him: Now I know what causes so many misunderstandings! No one knows what he really looks like! No one!

His heart grew heavy; he felt that it meant a really

overwhelming isolation, or rather, uncertainty. Life is too complicated for a simple man like myself, he thought; but for complicated men it must of course be quite simple.

He dozed off; it was quite quiet in the room.

Friedel was dreaming that she was travelling to Magdeburg—she had no idea why it was Magdeburg, but that was where she was going. She had to change trains, and she left her little case in the other train, which steamed out of the glass-covered station while she stood there looking at it as it went. One of the officials told her that she must telegraph, and so she started making up a telegram: "In the train to Königsberg, compartment No. 3264"—she was quite certain of the number—"a case has been left." What kind of a case? It wasn't leather, and it wasn't cardboard—there was some special name for it . . . She told the official to leave a space before the word "case," and then she began to think: what was the word? She thought and thought and thought; and at last she woke up and began to think again. Then she remembered: "Vulcan-fibre" was the word! She went to sleep again contentedly; and then she began to dream of a great green face, and the mouth in it was a cave into which you could go. "Let's go in," a man said to her, "we can get the business over much quicker in there." She went in, and all at once the mouth snapped shut, and she was in darkness, and alone. It was all terribly slippery—she slipped and screamed, and then it was all over. She slept on.

Fritz woke, got up softly, and went to Frau Frank's room. She had been waiting impatiently for him. The room in which she lived and slept was a very small one, with no window, and so the light had to be always on. Fritz did not like going into this room; it was crowded

and close—everywhere there were old, faded covers, empty clothes, and half-emptied cups. There was the sofa on which she slept, and a table and chair, all close up against each other.

"Come in, and shut the door," she said.

He went in unwillingly. It was warm, but not pleasantly warm—a stifling, damp warmth. Fritz had a painfully acute sense of smell, and he took a seat reluctantly. He felt rather at a loss. What did she want of him?

"I wanted to ask you a favour!"

She spoke absent-mindedly—as if she were dreaming, or sunk in thought. He had never known her like that; he looked up—her eyes were red and swollen; she had evidently been crying. Her voice was not the same as usual—pert, lively, determined; on the contrary, it was weak and irresolute. He thought of her secret . . .

He grew more confident, and settled himself more comfortably in his chair.

". . . willingly, if I can help at all!" he said.

"I know you very well by now," she began, rather hesitatingly. "I've always dealt fairly with you; you really haven't anything to grumble about, Fritz . . ." She paused, and, as he did not answer, went on: "You're a good fellow, and I don't know anyone else to whom I could say that . . ." She paused again, with a very earnest expression on her face. "It's not very nice, Fritz, to be as old as I am and to have no one to whom one can speak . . ."

When she said that—earnestly, reflectively, without any effort to be pathetic—she seemed to him to be no longer the old slattern, the brothel-mistress Mama Frank, but

just an old woman, with her eyelids swollen with crying. He suddenly lost his curiosity to know her secret; he no longer felt a stranger to her. His soul seemed to cry out:

". . . some day I, too, shall be as old as that! Ah, we poor human beings! It's always the same with us! What has *she* done? What have we all done?"

He sobbed and sobbed, and then, rather embarrassed because of his tears, he said:

". . . but you've always got *me* to speak to, Mother Frank!"

He put his hands on Frau Frank's flabby, luke-warm hands; then it struck him that it was like the examining magistrate, and he took his hands away.

Mother Frank began again.

"It's this, Fritz—my husband is here again! We've been nineteen years away from each other. The seaman, you know . . ."

A pause.

"Do you know who he is?—Mussolini!"

Fritz gave a start of surprise, and was going to say something, but he checked himself.

"Were you going to say something?" Frau Frank said.

"No! No! Go on!"

A pause.

"Yes. I only learnt it this morning"—she went on slowly, with pauses between the words—"from a police notice. That is to say, it's not him they're after; he's in the infirmary. Just imagine: he's been living close by here for years—just three streets away. I didn't know it! I didn't know a thing about it, and I was wanting so much . . ."

She began to cry. After a while she continued:

"Nineteen years ago he left me . . ."

A pause.

"Fritz, what I'm telling you now is as true as God! You do believe me, don't you?"

"Yes, of course I do, yes, yes!"

"My mother had a dressmaking establishment in Paris, and lived in a modest way. Until I was sixteen I was here with my father in Berlin—then he wanted to interfere with me, and I went to my mother in Paris. I was with her in her shop, and when I was twenty-eight I got to know Niklas Frank in a German singing-club in Paris. He was a German sailor; he had been in China during the Boxer rising, and had got wounded—and in those days there was still some money about for soldiers, because the Chinese had to pay everything. So they sent him to Paris to a famous surgeon, but nothing could be done with him, and so he became a kind of eunuch. I got to know him and fell in love with him; when he told me all about it, I told him that it wasn't so very important, but I felt terribly sorry for him because he was so miserable about it, though I didn't know exactly what was wrong; and we got married. When my father died we came to Berlin; that was in 1905, and I was thirty-nine. Everything went very well; I was really very fond of him, and the only thing was that he was so terribly suspicious. He was always thinking and saying that I was going with other men, because, he said, like other women, I couldn't live without it. Sometimes it was awful; he would get terribly worked up. I can swear—by my eternal salvation—that I should never have done it if he hadn't kept on driving the idea into my head over and over again. If I came home a little later than he did—he had a post at one of the Council

offices—he would ask me contemptuously what 'it' had been like, and describe 'it' to me in such a way that I grew nervous and afraid and terribly discontented. *He* was to blame for making me curious about it; it was the way he talked about it that made me want it, and *his* words that made me dream about it. And it was *he* that finally drove me into the arms of some man or other, who—who—who took away my chastity. Niklas learnt of it through my talking in my sleep, and one morning when I woke up he was no longer there . . ."

A pause.

". . . and now I see in a police notice that for years he's been living three streets away from me, and that he's become a criminal—like all of us! And I know that he became a criminal because he was unhappy about me! And I know I am what I am because he left me! He has become what he is because of me, and I have . . ." she pointed disconsolately round, at the wretchedness of the windowless room and at her own fat, cunning old face—"I have become this because of him. I am guilty towards him, and he is guilty towards me; and we are both innocent—my God! . . . We've been living two long, long lives close by each other—with three streets of this great town between us—this town where everything is made of stone, and everything is close to everything else: it's here where we all misunderstand each other, where we suffer and go to ruin and despair and death. Must we always go on living *near* each other? And is no one to blame, and yet each of us? Where's the justice of it? We become guilty, without knowing why. All of us! Why?"

Why?

An hour later Fritz carried out Frau Frank's request and went to the infirmary.

On the way there he thought how difficult his mission was.

It had begun to snow a little. The Elsässerstrasse, along which he was walking, was unusually full of life, and the people were bustling about; it suddenly occurred to him that this was Christmas Eve. The soft sentimentality of this idea began to get hold of him. But he was fully conscious of the nature of this feeling, and he did his best to assume a superior, derisive attitude towards it—to remain superior to this mass piety, as he called it to himself.

"Christmas, the festival of love," he thought, "—what irony there is in it after a war! The festival of the Church! And what is the Church? An institution with a concession from the State to take over the world conscience, with the individual consciences of all the 'faithful' in the world. An insurance company on a grand scale!"

Of course Christmas was nothing but a business affair. All mass feelings which have the backing of the State are primarily business concessions. Christmas undoubtedly brings a good turnover of feelings and of goods; that is clear, in every department of life. No doubt there would be five hundred journalists throughout the world once more writing the "Happy End" to the story with all the Christmas business in it and the lovely Christmas tree. Or writing about children, who press their noses flat against the toy-shop windows; or about prodigal sons who return to their homes at Christmas time . . .

Fritz passed a paper-shop; in the window were texts on cardboard, and one of them read:

"What you do, do with your whole heart,
As for the Lord, and not for men!"

"What's really the matter with me?" Fritz thought. "It must be possible to say definitely why I am discontented and other people are contented . . . Ah! . . ." Tears welled up in his eyes again. It was very cold, and he had no overcoat; but that was not why he was crying. . . . A fat old woman in front of him dropped a five-mark note; he picked it up quickly, and put it in his pocket; it made him feel happy.

All at once, as he was going along, he felt a desire to make a scene somewhere—perhaps in the paper-shop, over that text; but he realised that he could not really bring himself to do it. Besides, what was the good of a scene? What could it achieve? What good could it do anyone?

Who thinks of the birth of Christ when he hears the word Christmas? Priests, because they are paid for it, and children, because someone else is still looking after them. And naïve people in villages—people who are doomed . . . He went on.

". . . what I want is only to find peace, to be able to be good, to be able to exist for myself alone . . ."

As he came near the infirmary it occurred to him that Frau Frank was probably a Jewess; but the Jews, he thought, make the most of Christmas. Jews are always ready to deceive themselves and other people, not so much to get something out of it as from a sense of the artistic. They have imagination, he told himself, and that's why I like them so much . . .

Frank was already out of bed, and was walking up and

down in the little corridor. He was wearing slippers, and he seemed to be talking to himself; he was waving his arms all the time.

A nurse led Fritz to him; she first asked him who he was and what he had come for. As he was afraid that he might not be allowed to see Frank, he said that he had come specially from—from—Hamburg, in order to visit his—uncle, as he had heard of his accident.

"From Hamburg?" she inquired. "It's a nice place, isn't it?" She spoke in a soft voice, pronouncing each word distinctly, with a girlish shyness and yet in a friendly way. "I'm going to Hamburg myself . . ."

She was going to say something more, but Fritz showed signs of impatience.

"Is that so?" he said, and drummed on the table with his fingers. She grasped that he was in a hurry, looked at him silently for a moment, and then said, still in a very friendly way:

"You're in a hurry . . . ?"—and went ahead with him following.

She went on along the corridor, without any embarrassment or nervousness, without glancing round. It struck him how quietly she walked. He noticed her white dress and her short, dark hair; she was clean and good, he thought, beyond question good. Fritz began to regret that he had been in such a hurry. He suddenly realised what a yearning he had for this simple kindliness, for honesty, cleanliness and quiet. He thought of Friedel, of her coarse, warm body, her thick lips, her crumpled linen. . . . The nurse turned round and said to him—was she smiling or not?—

"There's your uncle!"

She turned aside and went away. Fritz forgot her the moment he saw the man. Not a pleasant business, he thought—a eunuch! He saw his thin, old-maidenish lips.

"Good day, Herr Frank," he said, and put out his hand.

"You're from the Criminal Investigation Department?" he asked, rather hesitatingly, proffering his fat, cold hand.

Fritz answered: "No! I must have a talk with you; I've come from Adolf . . ." He lowered his voice; Frank was obviously suspicious.

There was a small white bench in the corridor, and they sat down on it. At first Fritz was rather nervous, and his heart was beating; then he felt that there was no time to be lost. And after a while another strange idea became dominant in his mind: I'm playing now with the fates of two persons, as if they are balls, he thought; it is quite clear that it all hangs on me: I can make this shrivelled-up old man calm and happy, or drive him mad and even kill him—it all depends on what I say; the words my brain fashions can do either!

He felt very self-possessed, and no longer embarrassed. He was confident of the line he was going to take. All at once he asked a question: it surprised even himself when he asked it. He hadn't been thinking of it at all.

"Who is that nurse that came with me?"

"Sister Irma?"

So her name is Irma—he thought—Irma! I might have known it; she's a German!

"What's it you want, anyway? I can't believe you came here just to find out something about the nurse."

The old man did not speak in dialect. It was evident that it hurt him to speak, that as a rule he spoke in a harsh, loud voice; but now it was weak and restrained.

"Herr Frank, my name is Fritz Semiovski . . . Russian Fritz, that's right. I live at the same lodgings as Adolf, and the landlady's name is—Frau Frank!"

Frank gave a start of surprise; he tried to say something, but Fritz went on quickly, looking steadily into his cool, bright, hard eyes. What a lot this man might have done!—he thought. He went on speaking for what must have been an hour, without intermission, and Frank said nothing. Fritz spoke on and on—now he was enjoying his part, and he was quite indifferent whether he was helping the man or not, and he did not care when Herr Frank gradually crumpled up and covered his face with his hands. This pathetic sight did not in the least move Fritz, and he sat there looking at him as a doctor looks at a patient. And although his own voice was trembling with emotion he kept quite cool, and noted it objectively. He was filled with an overwhelming sense of power.

Suddenly the piquancy of the situation struck him. He put himself in the unhappy woman's place, and invented thousands of sufferings which she had been through, thousands of sleepless nights of remorse, of diabolical misery . . .

". . . my God, but it's Christmas-time!"—the thought came into his head, and he uttered it. "There are lights in all the houses—we poor wretches, we outcasts who are rejected and despised—what are we doing? We're tormenting each other! Our hearts are dark, and why? Why, Herr Frank? . . . Your wife has grown old, her hands are shaky . . ."—and Herr Frank wept and Fritz wept. It was touching to see them, and one shouldn't laugh at them, Sister Irma thought as she came past; they were all her own people.

Fritz went out, and telephoned somewhere, and Frau Frank, the old slattern, came along. The two old people fell into each other's arms, and Fritz did what he had read in books was the thing to do: he retired discreetly. When he got out into the fresh air he took a deep breath.

He went slowly home and packed his box; Friedel was not at home. He took some money and went away from his lodgings without taking leave of anyone. Just as he got out into the street, Herr and Frau Frank came along arm in arm.

"You're going away?" Frau Frank asked. She was now quite dignified and motherly again.

"I'm leaving you, Mother Frank," said Fritz; "I have to go to Hamburg."

Frau Frank's motherliness left her.

"No, my dear sir. With all the friendliness in the world, you really can't do that! You must give eight days' notice, and the eight days . . ."

"But Friedel is staying on!"

"Is that so? Oh well, then it's all right!"

Their leave-taking was brief and moving. Then he hurried away, as he did not wish to meet Friedel. He felt that he simply *could* not meet her again. He would write to her later on, and in any case she would console herself with someone else, he thought; but he knew quite well that was not true, and that she was really very much in love with him.

As he hurried away from her like that, he said to himself: "Once again I am to blame." His heart was heavy. . . . "I can't help it . . ."

Herr Frank, now once more Mussolini, knocked at Adolf's door and went in. He told Adolf casually, but quite plainly, that it was he, Mussolini, who had betrayed Vassilii, and that he would tell his colleagues about it. Adolf began to tremble with fear, and he gave back to Mussolini the money which Vassilii had brought and given to him.

"But you won't say anything about it?" he asked anxiously.

"On my honour!" Mussolini answered cuttingly.

In the evening he went with Frau Frank to a café, and next morning he bought a Christmas tree, and they helped each other to decorate it; in the evening they stood in front of it and sang: "Holy night, in silence deep!" The old people loved each other very much; and they got drunk.

The Mexican next door felt so homesick that he could not get to sleep at all that night.

Later on Fritz learnt from a newspaper report, and also from a man from the Criminal Investigation Department, that soon after their reunion the two old people had quarrelled again, and had driven each other into the grave. It was a sad story, and it moved Fritz deeply, for it had been his fault . . .

Everything, every single thing he did, whether it was good or evil, always turned out badly, always brought guilt with it. "They drove each other into the grave . . ."

Adolf, so Fritz heard, had got some money as the result of a blackmailing campaign, and had then increased his wealth by moneylending, finally achieving the ownership of a grocery business in 1927. On the opening night, however, when the sausages were gleaming, and the knives

and the white aprons were all ready, he hanged himself; he left his property to the Communist Party funds, but the Party would not accept the bequest.

And that's the way with everything—men, rooms, houses—everything goes to ruin. It's only with me—each man thinks—that things will be different.

Fritz went to Hamburg; he had a presentiment that now he would soon find Vassilii, and with him the great secret; then he might find rest. He suddenly felt sad: it would mean that the secret would no longer be a secret. Whatever it might be, it would have been revealed; Vassilii would open his mouth and say: "So and so!"—or "So and so!"

And Fritz would think: "So that is the great secret! That's all it is! . . ." It would not alter anything in his life; he would only know a little more, that's all . . .

He shut his eyes and went to sleep; the train rolled on monotonously through the night. He dreamt of a great white plain, treeless and infinite. That's the lake that lies behind the eastern wood, a great dark lake, though it's white now, a white plain on which people go to sleep if they want to die. It's there they found the woman, an old maid, the people said; the fingers on one hand were missing, all but the thumb. When the priest came to bury her, he said: "The marmalade is very good at Ilia Krasnin's in Odoievsk." Then all the little birds flew away, and it turned cold; but their children came back in the summer. Holy night, in silence deep. All things save the squire sleep. He was sitting in his room; when you stood outside you could see in; the room was light, and there he was sitting—no, he was lying, bloody and naked, and he

said: ". . . there's a great secret . . . !"

Fritz thought: I want to know the great secret; it will be very bitter, and perhaps, too, it will be very sweet—just like my home country. And when I learn the secret, I'll have to cry a great deal, and I'll long to sleep. I am so tired. I ought to have a nurse to look after me. I am a shrub that someone has pulled up by the roots. Oh, the roots are thirsting! I have no home!

Home! That's a beautiful word! There's no such word in the Russian language! The village is burnt down; I'll make a song about it and I'll sing it:

"My village is burnt down.
I make a song,
I sing a song,
My village is burnt down.

My hut is destroyed,
The Madonna has fallen.
The snow drifts across,
Snow, snow, everywhere snow—
My village is burnt down—
Soft, flaky snow."

Fritz hummed to himself in his sleep; the man next to him gave him a push:

"Quiet, neighbour, I'm trying to sleep!"

Fritz woke up and stopped making a noise. What silly things he had been dreaming! It was very quiet in the compartment, and pitch dark. Christ had been born; and they were all tired out. The stars were glittering . . .

With a noise like thunder the train ran under the dome

of the Central Station at Hamburg. Fritz got out of his carriage and stepped down on to the platform. There he saw a girl standing at the barrier; she had a case in each hand, and under her arm an umbrella; she was in nurse's dress—she was Sister Irma! He felt more cheerful at once, just because he had caught sight of someone he knew, and it had driven off that terrible feeling of isolation and coldness which had been weighing him down since that dream he had had. He gave her a deep bow, and was going to pass on; but then he noticed that she showed no sign of recognition; she looked embarrassed and stand-offish, and she did not return his greeting. But her face looked to him so attractive, so warm . . . she was standing there looking so lonely; she must be waiting for some friend, or for her mother, who hadn't come, or who was late—and she didn't like my greeting her, he thought.

He went on, smiling a little over the stand-offish girl who was so helpless. He passed through the barrier, and now he was in the huge, bustling station hall. There he came to a halt: where was he to go?

All at once someone touched his shoulder, quite gently, but he noticed it. He swung round, and there she was again—Sister Irma, in a great fluster, very flushed, and very helpless, still carrying a case in each hand and an umbrella under her arm. She had touched his shoulder with hers.

"I only wanted to say—excuse my not returning your greeting—the fact is I didn't recognise you at first—I just wanted to tell you that . . ."—and as he did not answer, her face grew scarlet, and she added in confusion—"Really!"—and half turned away. By then he had recovered his composure.

"But, Sister Irma . . . !"

She turned to him again; now they were both very embarrassed. At last she said to him, with a faint smile:

"But of course, you're from Hamburg: where is the Grindelallee, what's my best way of getting there?"

Meanwhile Fritz was looking at her, and suddenly his heart seemed to rise up to his throat, and in a flash he realised: "I love her!" It was a remarkable and unexpected sensation, which he had never experienced before; it was strange, almost unpleasant, and yet it was sweet, painful and intimate. He knew those three words—he had come across them in novels, in films, and in the babbling of girls in the nights; and now they came into his head, quite naturally and vividly, without any of that dreary, meretricious air of make-believe.

"I love her!" All ready-made: "I love her!"

She was of medium height, and her face was not at all out-of-the-way or striking—it was almost commonplace, mild and insignificant. Her hair was dark, with a simple parting; and her eyes were dark, deep and shy: they had none of the banal motherliness characteristic of fat people, but were filled with a delightful intimacy—a simple, shy kindness, of the sort that understands everything and nothing. Her cheeks were smooth, unpainted, not full, but, if anything, a little pinched; her lips were bright red, unkissed; he was strangely touched by their wistfulness and by her whole frail form . . . one can confide everything to her, he thought, everything . . .

He said:

"I can't tell you, Sister Irma, where the Grindelallee is. I'm not really from Hamburg—that is to say . . . no, no, no—I'll tell you straight why I told you that yesterday, if

you want me to. Don't go away! Please don't! I beg you . . . !"

He lost all consciousness of what he was doing, and he let himself sink into the blissful sense of her nearness. His heart seemed to expand; he was smiling. He spoke without a pause, as he had never spoken before, telling her of all the naughtiness that had been in his heart. The childish word "naughty" came into his mind . . . "now I'm going to be good," he thought.

"You're smiling all the time," Sister Irma said; "and what's making you cry, then?"

That station at night, crowded with noisy, hurrying people, full of bustle and light and sound! It was a wonderful place, when he came to think about it. Like a flash, without warning of any kind, happiness had come to him at last. He had forgotten everything in the past.

He said, almost apologetically: "To-morrow is another holiday. I wonder if you would be here again to-morrow about two o'clock?"

She nodded; she herself did not know why. Then he rushed away; he could not stand still any longer, among all these people. He must be by himself!

But Sister Irma stood there with her umbrella and her two boxes, and she still did not know how to get to the Grindelallee. She was absolutely helpless.

"A strange creature," she thought to herself, "he's not from Hamburg, and to judge from his speech he's not a German at all. I wonder why he was crying . . . ?"

She thought about him, not as she might have thought about a stranger. There flashed through her mind, for less than an instant, the thought that he or someone else

might be making a fool of her or might have some evil design against her—she was twenty years of age.

"He's an unhappy man, that's clear," she kept on thinking. She seemed to have to keep on thinking about him. "How he did cry! And all the time he was smiling!"

When, much later that night, she had been welcomed by her relatives in the Grindelallee and was lying in bed, she was still thinking: "How he did smile!"—and she, too, smiled, and then she fell asleep.

Next morning, when she came to think over soberly her experiences of the day before, she could not understand how she could have acted like that. She put it down to the fact that she had been so tired after the long journey during which she had been half-asleep, half-dreaming, and to her feeling of uncertainty in a strange town. What did that man want of her? She did not know him; they had never been introduced; and besides, he was not very respectably dressed. Of course she would not keep the appointment for that afternoon. After all, was it even an appointment? She had nodded, but that was a long way from being a promise—it might only have meant, for example, that she was listening attentively to him . . . Had she given him any promise just by nodding? No! And if she had, what was this strange man to her? Besides, he had told her a lie: he wasn't from Hamburg at all . . . !

But at two o'clock in the afternoon she went there. It is true that she scolded herself and made excuses to herself for going, but she went there all the same. From some distance off she saw him standing there expectantly, turning his cap round and round in his hand, and with

his eyes gleaming. He was looking excitedly in every direction, with his neck stretched out; he was still a mere lad. All her doubts of the morning had gone. "I really know him quite well already," she felt, "he's an acquaintance of mine, and I think he's very peculiar—I'd like to know a little more about him." She held out her hand to him.

They walked several times round the station; once they came to a halt on a bridge under which a locomotive was waiting, half-hidden in steam.

"How beautiful you are!" he said in a tone of devotion. Nothing more than that.

They were silent. Each was thinking about the other. They went on walking round. At last she said:

"You were going to tell me something else . . ."—she had thought out this sentence a hundred times, and yet it did not come out smoothly—how absurd it was! She wasn't so shy as a rule!

He answered her, although she had not finished what she was going to say. He told her about the Franks—leaving out nothing but the nature of Frank's infirmity and Frau Frank's former profession. He was surprised to notice that he had omitted any mention of these. No one had told him that those were not the kind of things to talk about to ladies; but he could not talk to her about things like that. He looked at her profile, and saw the faint glow on her cheeks—"God! How good you are!" he thought. "I'm walking along now, and you're walking with me, as if we belong to each other . . ."

"Tell me something more!" she said.

And so he began to tell her about Russia, one thing after another and finally the whole story. It was getting

late in the afternoon, and it was already nearly dusk; the first yellow lamps were already burning. The weather was gloomy, cold and damp; everyone was hurrying along except these two, who kept on walking slowly round and round the railway station.

Why was he telling her all these gloomy tales? He had not thought of any reason; he had never told the story before, and he had never believed that he could ever tell it; but now he was telling her everything, without either diffidence or confidence. He told the whole story, every bit of it, to that little girl, and she just went on keeping quiet and never said a word, never made a sound. They were still walking.

". . . and that's the shoe . . ." he said, digging into his breast pocket and pulling out an old dirty shoe, all falling to pieces.

They both stopped, and she took the shoe from his hand; then she held it in her hand for a moment and looked at it. They were standing under a lamp; it was cold, and shadows were flitting past them. She looked up into his eyes, and said slowly:

"I think . . . one might get very fond of you!" And she bent down her head and touched the shoe with her lips; then, without raising her head again, she pressed the shoe into his hands and touched his hands, and—before he could speak, before he could say anything, even a single word, or make any sound—she rushed away and was gone. Like a shadow, in a single step she disappeared into the grey mist of evening . . .

He remained standing there, completely helpless, absolutely overwhelmed. He was holding the shoe in his hands.

She had gone. Cold shadows flitted past in the fog. A train rolled along under the bridge. Motor-horns were blowing; a tram was ringing its bell; a man's voice sounded loud and then was gone. The fog had blotted out everything—a great, soft, billowy fog.

A policeman suddenly appeared, walked slowly up to him, and stopped:

"Aren't you well, young man?" he asked in a solicitous tone, with just a trace of banter.

Fritz stuttered something and walked on. He suddenly felt very cold; he had no overcoat. It was intensely cold; when he breathed, his head was shrouded in steam. All the men had their coat-collars turned up. The men? Men were walking hither and thither; it was the day after Christmas, and the sky was blotted out; and now he, too, began to walk quickly, and he turned up his coat-collar. He felt that now he was one of all these men; he was no longer lonely and outcast, he thought, for he had a friend, a little girl, a little girl made of silver. Yes, she was made of silver.

Irma, he thought—a short, slim creature, bare-headed, with delicate hands and dark hair—Irma—Irma . . .

He hurried along through the dark streets. There were very few people about, as it was a holiday, and most people were sitting comfortably in their own warm rooms. He just hurried along through one street after another, through dark streets and streets that were brilliantly illuminated; he hurried along with his coat-collar turned up, without noticing where he was going. Once he looked up and noticed how quiet and empty the street was, and that the fog was gradually dispersing, so that he could see a little bit of the sky with a star in it. He hurried on and

on, and he thought:

"I'm not at all a bad man, thanks be to God, I'm only a little muddled; that's a failing I was born with, and I'm sure that I'd be good if I could only keep her—I'm sure of it. Dear God, you kind, dear God, who gave me tears —give her to me! I thank you, I thank you from my heart!"

He hurried along, praying as he went, almost the whole night through.

It was very late when he reached the house where he had booked a small room that morning; the room was tidy, but the bed was nothing more than a mattress covered with cushions. The landlady had told him that she had no other room vacant, as her good room was already let . . .

Fritz reached home, all the time thinking of Irma—nothing concrete, neither about her body nor about touching her nor about marrying her some day. He had an almost mystical feeling of having been purified, and he thought that any crude idea would be an insult to her. He thought of her with a feeling of happiness such as he had never felt before. He stood for a long time in front of the mirror looking at himself; then he got into bed—taking the shoe with him. He thought for some time that he could still smell a faint fragrance.

He fell asleep and began to dream.

It was a turbulent dream, and it lasted a very long time, a terribly long time—days and days, nights and weeks:

Getting up on cold, dark mornings, and weariness in nights of uncertainty. The whole of this was a single dream; and when he awoke it was April. He asked him-

self repeatedly whether he was not still dreaming, because everything was so unreal, and all his experiences were indirect and abstract; this period was like an illness, a fog, a brain-storm, and there was no action in the dream, as there never is in a dream. It was like a series of pictures which by the end have all been forgotten but for one general impression; when he woke up he remembered only Irma—Irma—Irma: her smile at the dark street corner where they parted; her ravishing, cold hands under the marble top of a table in a café, with a fiddle playing; her frail body in a dress of bright-green, close-fitting velvet at some festival; and her eyes here, her eyes there—good eyes, motherly eyes, anxious eyes, heavenly eyes watching over his sleep; earthly eyes—eyes, eyes, always the same eyes.

Fritz was so happy!

It was really like a dream. They met without prearrangement, and they rushed into each other's arms; they said nothing; their eyes shone, and their cheeks glowed; they walked arm in arm, and she put her cold hand into his pocket with his—and she brushed close past his face just as he was waking up.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"I'm kissing you!" she said.

It was really a dream!

She went everywhere with him. He got a job with a pious Jew who ran a store in the town—a wholesale business, dealing in soap, brushes, and washing materials; Fritz pushed a barrow through the streets, taking supplies to the little grocers' shops and the greengrocers. The work was hard, but one got used to it; and Fritz liked it because it gave him so much time to himself. Sometimes he had also to work in the shop, or in the great, dark cellar: on

one occasion he had to do it for two days on end, when cases with a large quantity of supplies had come in. The cellar was large and quiet, and the roof was vaulted; there were electric lamps shining here and there, and the place re-echoed when he walked between the boxes. Fritz had got into the habit of praying here; he would kneel on the cases and close his eyes, raising his eyeballs upwards as much as he could under his eyelids; and immediately he became very meek. Just above his head there was a long, dark cloud to which he spoke. When he had finished, he would pick up his hammer and drive in some more nails, or do some other work.

As a rule, however, he found his barrow already loaded in the morning; the chief or his wife gave him the invoices, and he started off. The chief had a frank, fat face; he was straightforward and kindly, and always ready to help Fritz with his work; but Fritz liked best to be alone or out on his round, for he found his chief's easy-going nature very disturbing—it seemed to him to be too ordinary, too banal, for a dream. There was also a girl called Emma who worked there; she would willingly have started an affair with Fritz—often when he had anything to do by himself in the cellar she would follow him down to get something or other, and would begin humming softly as she passed him. At first Fritz used to think of going off with her for once, but he kept postponing it; and finally she stopped coming down to the cellar, which made Fritz feel annoyed.

Once or twice a week he met Irma—she was in a hospital and only got one or two evenings off. On the days preceding these evenings he was always in a particularly cheerful mood as he went along the streets; he

looked contemptuously at all the hurrying men and women whose cheeks were pale in the light of the lamps; it got dark early at that time of the year, and when darkness fell everyone in this district seemed to grow ugly and wretched, although many rich people lived there.

When he had finished his round of deliveries he would take a tram home and change his clothes—he had bought himself a good suit on the instalment system. And a strange idea took great hold of his mind: he felt that if the conductor of the tram on which he rode had no beard, then he was going to have a particularly good time that evening, but if he had a beard, then things weren't going to go so well. But the conductor was always beardless, and every evening with Irma was delightful.

So he went home by tram; there was a gas light in his room, and he asked his landlady to let him have some hot water for shaving. The landlady was a widow, a fat woman of undisputed intelligence who, like every landlady in the world, had once known better days and now spent her time bewailing and lamenting, working herself to death, but with so little system and purpose that almost everything she did had to be done over again by her servant-girl. But sometimes Fritz would be awakened at night, out of his heavy sleep, by the distant, muffled sound of a piano; that was his landlady, who now and then would get out of bed in the night and play the piano till morning.

Fritz shaved and changed his clothes. They had arranged to meet at half-past eight, at the exit of the Central Station; but he used regularly to get there too early, and to wait for her. An old woman was standing

there selling newspapers, and calling out their names; she took a separate breath for each paper.

Suddenly she came and was there by him. When she came to meet him she always wore ordinary clothes; she thought he liked it better. She came and looked at him, and thought to herself that now she might just go away again and have the pleasure of thinking for days on end about the next time she would be seeing him.

He went up to her, and his face became radiant; he took her two hands in his, holding her away from him and looking closely at her, at her face and her hair. He shut his eyes for a moment and smiled with happiness; then he opened them again and said good-day to her.

It really was a dream!

They went together into the cinema. He held her hand, and she took his hand and held it fleetingly, for only an instant, against her little, soft breast. Tears came into his eyes: he could not help it.

Afterwards they talked and had a long discussion about the film. They got excited about it, and walked round for hours. And she began to feel irritated, for she felt rather above him, and all at once she thought: "Who is this man?"

He dreamed dreams in which everything seemed to be dark blue. They were on the edge of the town; it was night, and everything was quiet. Rain was falling; they were standing in silence under the scaffolding of some new building. He whispered a short word in Russian to her, and Russia, dreamy and sad, seemed to surge over him. He took her gently and simply in his arms and kissed her. Her lips opened, and she seemed to lose consciousness, lying in his arms. He was dreaming . . .

Once she came to him without having arranged it beforehand. When she first came into his room they were both embarrassed. He lit the gas; it was a gloomy room, cold and rather bare and with no carpet. They sat down on the low, narrow sofa; she kept her cloak on, and he sat by her. She felt cold. They said nothing.

Suddenly she felt: "Why? Why am I sitting here?"

She thought of central heating and bright light, of bookcases and people with jovial laughter, of little silk-shaded lamps, and of novels. . . . Why was she sitting here in this cold, dark room? Could it be romantic when it was so uncomfortable? Who was this man? After all, wasn't he a foreigner?

. . . No!—she smiled. He was her child, her little boy, who loved her so dearly; her heart warmed towards him, and she took his hand and put it against her cheek: he's my boy, she thought.

But sitting there by her side, in the midst of his happy, satisfied, absorbing dream, he suddenly became aware of a terrible doubt in his mind: "Does she really belong to me?" he asked himself anxiously. He wanted then and there to take her in his arms and stroke her where he liked—her little breast—it was strange how his eyes filled with tears when he thought of it—her thighs, her back; to stroke her, long and ardently and passionately . . . until she pressed herself against him—like . . . (he may have had a fleeting thought of Friedel)—and then, then, when all that he had never yet dared to think of had taken place, then he would be able to believe in her. It was not that he wanted to possess her; he only wanted to know whether she would give herself to him. That was the way he thought of it: he wanted to know that, and

indeed he felt that now he *must* know it. He was trembling: if she did that for him, then, he thought, she was his, then she would never leave him.

And with trembling hands he began to draw her to him, to excite her; he pulled her towards him, pressed her madly to himself, stroked her whole body, startled by what he was doing, even the forbidden places; and all the time he was still thinking, still quite in control of himself. He kissed her till at last she no longer made any resistance, till her soft, warm mouth opened, yielding and faint, and the intoxication of his caresses overcame her: ". . . after all, I love him . . ." She rested against his chest, yielding, with eyes closed, expectant, filled with desire—while he remained sober and calm, and could not submerge himself in her love because he felt that he must *think:* and then, while he was hesitating, her hot hands sought him and drew him to her; her eyes rested on him—then he forgot everything in his delirious joy, and she—she breathed deeply, her eyes grew heavy and tired, and they closed . . .

It was a Sunday evening in April—already night. Someone beat on the door and shouted:

"Hallo . . . !"

Both of them staggered up, opening their eyes. Gasping for breath, he asked in a hoarse voice:

"Who's that? What's the matter?"

The voice outside shouted:

"Hindenburg has been elected! Hindenburg . . ."

The voice wandered off, and the next moment they heard a knocking on another door, and the same words bawled out; then gradually it got quiet again

but for the shouting in the street.

Fritz stood up, and walked about the room.

"So Hindenburg is elected . . ." he said.

His voice was thick and tired, and he walked with a stoop, as if he were ill. Irma was leaning back in a corner of the sofa, with her face buried in her hands.

There was a long silence. He walked up and down, and she did not stir.

Silence.

She moved, and shrugged her shoulders; he thought: now I shall see her face. But she was motionless again, with her hands in front of her face. How the gas was buzzing!

He came to a halt and said:

"Hindenburg's already quite an old man . . ."—and as she was still silent and motionless, with her hands over her face, he flung himself at her feet, burying his head in her bosom, and stammering meaningless words, such as: "Forgive me! Forgive me! Forgive me!"

But the only words that were ringing in her ears were ". . . already quite an old man . . ."

She got up, as if she did not see him, and so quickly that he nearly overbalanced; and she said in a calm voice: "But I must go now!" He saw that her face was just the same as usual.

He was still on the ground, and before he could say a word she had gone to the door and out of the room; the door closed, and everything was quiet.

He lay still in front of the sofa, and it seemed to him like a dream. He fell asleep and woke again. Suddenly he realised that she had gone; he jumped up and pulled open the door and shouted into the dark passage,

as loudly as he could: "Stop!"

No one halted; there was no one there, and everything was quiet. He tore open the door of the flat, rushed down the stairs, sprang to the door of the building and out into the street . . .

It was a mild, still evening, but there was a great deal of bustle in the town. Although it was already late, there were groups of people in the streets, and numbers of police; buildings were lighted up, and the huge town was filled with noise. He went up and down the streets, rushing breathlessly past the groups of people who were eagerly discussing things. He came to a halt, and looked round; he had been rushing so wildly that he had to put his hand up to his heart.

He was standing in the Bernhardstrasse, in the district of St. Pauli, at a point where dark steps led down to the harbour and the landing-stages. In the evening this was Hamburg's gloomiest spot; all round him there was the sordid stillness of that gloomy district, with the small lights of taverns, dark shapes, and women.

The dream is over, he thought.

He went slowly home. His landlady was playing the piano, and she did not hear him as he gently opened the door of the flat. He listened for a while to her playing, and then he fell asleep.

It was raining when he woke in the morning. He got up, yawning, washed himself, and played with his braces; he looked at himself in the mirror, just as he was, with his hair uncombed. The dream is over for good, he thought.

There was a knock, and the landlady whispered good

morning through the chink of the door, and told him that she was not yet dressed, but that he was wanted on the telephone. He went out. It was Irma: she begged him to excuse her running away like that, and when would she be seeing him again? Fritz fixed a time, hung up the receiver, returned to his room and went on combing his hair.

The dream—he thought—*that* is over.

It was not that perhaps he no longer loved her or loved her any the less—in a fit of cynicism he thought that it was only now that he loved her really. In the evenings he thirsted for her, but it was no longer a dream; it was cold life, a law of nature, the usual thing. He longed to touch her mouth, her shoulders, and then—to possess her.

He went to the shop; the barrow was standing there, already loaded up with soap. He had to go rather a long way, to Winterhude, and he started off. But when he had taken a few steps he came to a halt, put down the barrow and went back to the shop.

"Have you forgotten something?" the chief asked, with a fleeting glance at him. Fritz answered "Yes!" and went in to the back room, which was crowded up with boxes. There Emma was working, under a reddish-yellow electric light, in front of a dim grey window with iron bars which looked out on to a courtyard. He went quite simply to her and put his hand on her shoulder; he felt her warm body.

"Well, Emma . . ." he said.

She submitted to it; in fact, for a moment it seemed to him that her shoulder moved to meet the pressure of his hand. Then she freed herself and asked with a curious mixture of shyness and impudence:

"What are you after?"

He smiled at her.

"Well, what about this evening? Shall we . . ."

She was staring at him, and she interrupted:

"No!" she said, so loudly that it seemed as if she were trying to shout herself down—he was afraid that the chief would hear it from the front of the shop—"No! No!"

Her eyes suddenly filled with tears; now he realised that she was a pretty creature, rather fat, dark, with great round black eyes and firm legs in light silk stockings. The blood rushed to his head; he swung round quickly and went out without a word.

The girl stared at him, and after him as he went; when he had gone, she sat down, completely at a loss, on one of the boxes. Her brain worked rather slowly. She did love him! Why had she said No?

He pushed off with his barrow. It was raining slightly, and he was in a melancholy mood. When at last evening came and he was free, he went quickly home, changed his clothes and shaved, and then walked aimlessly through the streets. Then, as he was walking through the fine rain, without caring where he went, he suddenly read the word HIPPODROME. It hit him like a blow: Hippodrome . . . that means horses, horses!

What a long time it was since he had seen a horse! Cab-hacks and cart-horses in the streets, of course—and miserable, mutilated horses in the war—but those were not the kind of horse that would be inside there . . .

A horse, a black mare, rearing up, with eyes like dark silver balls—her quivering jaws were hot, gigantic, dropping foam . . . a horse rearing in front of him with its

iron hoofs: the squire's steed—hey, the whip flashed like a glowing streak!—burning hot breath, from the beast and from its master.

And the countryside appeared: a village, one hut and another, and there the squire's house, built of stone; the squire was sitting in the window and drinking, an immense brute, a dog, a pig—the squire, little master—the peasants bowed low to him . . .

Horses! A couple of steps down, and then a cellar; you push through a heavy, damp green curtain. The atmosphere inside was like a warm, sour, soft cloth—a mixture of beer, horses, and human wretches. A large square basement, gloomy, damp and depressing, and in the middle, three steps down, a square space which formed the arena. Above and round the arena the place was full of sleeping stokers, drunken sailors, sad exotics who were staring straight in front of them; and here and there among them wretched little whores in green jumpers or bright-coloured cotton frocks.

In the middle of the arena there were ten or fifteen undersized, rather stumpy horses, pressed close together, and one or two men cracking their whips. When the whips cracked the animals started convulsively and raised their triangular ears; their eyes were like Emma's, round, black and timid—oh, the horses! One of them, with a warm, brown, hard neck, came to the side and begged for something; a heavy-eyed stoker poured beer between its headgear, and the animal licked it up with its tongue. The waiters, great, square-shouldered fellows, walked slowly about with watchful eyes.

Fritz sat down at a table. The band was sitting on a slightly raised platform at the top end of the arena, and

when one of the men with the whips called out "Go!" it began to play popular songs—the "Dollar Princess" or "We have no bananas." The musicians were fat old men with red faces, and they played without any spirit.

A few of the girls were riding round, showing their under-clothes as they rode. One of the sailors woke up and shouted "Emma!" Fritz gave a start; but some unknown girl jumped down obediently from her horse and went towards the sailor. By then, however, he was already asleep again; she cursed, walked back to the arena and went on riding.

Fritz looked at it all, and he grew sad, like everything else here, including the horses. Time seemed to be standing still, or moving slowly like a time-exposure. Everything seemed to be gloomy and weary, and every movement seemed to drag. The lads come here—Fritz thought—after they've been three months at sea, working, sleeping, and toiling hard; then they come into port, and they draw all their pay; for three months they have been dreaming at night of marvellous lights, and lively girls, of music, drink and love—and what's it like now?—Fritz thought. Now they just fall asleep . . .

The horses kept on going round, without any spirit, but yet with an air of knowing a great deal.

"Vassilii!"—Fritz thought—"I must look for him; he is just like these horses—they look as if they know some great secret."

Fritz felt how tired he was getting.

He felt lonely, and he drank a great deal.

When he woke up he was lying on a sofa in a tiny, quiet room with white enamelled furniture; a girl was sitting

on a chair by his side, quite still, earnestly reading a book —just her lips moved as she read. It was absolutely quiet in this room.

His head was hurting, and he remembered the Hippodrome; he must have drunk a great deal, and then gone off somewhere; now he was lying on a red plush sofa.

He tried to get up; the girl looked up, and her fat, smiling peasant face with light straw-coloured hair gradually broke into a sickly smile, and became the haggard face of a whore; she laughed.

"Are you awake, my dear?" she asked, and sat down by him and caressed him.

"Oh, I'm all right," he said calmly, with an air of indifference.

He stayed the night with her. Early in the morning they woke up. He was quite affectionate with her; she stroked his head softly in a motherly way, and gently placed his head against her naked breast, and he lay like that.

"Just rest quietly!" she said, giving him a little cool kiss on his forehead. He fell asleep again.

When it grew light he woke up. He got up softly and put on his clothes; she was still asleep. He put all the money he had—probably more than was necessary—on the table, and disappeared.

He went straight to the shop without washing, and pushed his barrow round the whole day long without saying a word. He was very tired. In the late afternoon, when it began to rain again, he brought the barrow back and said he was not feeling well. The chief was sympathetic, and recommended various remedies, asking

whether he needed any money. Fritz did not like it; he did not want to talk to anyone. The chief gave him five marks; Fritz thanked him, and all at once Fritz looked at his employer and thought: "He's a good man!"—and then he realised that he had said it quite loud.

"Do you mean me?" the chief asked in an embarrassed voice.

Fritz did not answer, but went out. The chief called his wife, and told her with astonishment what Fritz had said.

"Perhaps the fever was on him," his wife suggested.

Fritz took a tram to his lodgings; the conductor had a beard . . .

Fritz brushed his clothes and shaved and washed; the gas-mantle was broken, and so it was only half light in the room. It was getting darker and darker. Fritz still had plenty of time; he only had to be at the station at half-past eight, and it was now seven. It was absolutely quiet but for the rain outside.

And so in the evening he met Irma. They came up to each other and shook hands. "Where shall we go?" Fritz asked, and she said it did not matter, that any café near there would do.

They sat at a small round marble-topped table; he held her left hand, and they talked a great deal. It was late when they parted. He thought to himself: What was it we've been talking about? There had been many pauses, and then she had asked whether he hadn't heard anything of Vassilii. What had made her think of that? It had just simply occurred to her. No, he had told her, he

had heard nothing of Vassilii, and he wondered why she wanted to know.

She is just inquisitive, he thought; she feels that there's some exciting secret—I've become too ordinary for her romantic mind. If she has anything to do with a person like me, then there has got to be something either exciting or sentimental—I must be the occasion for some emotion of kindness or for some nervous tension.

On the way home someone under a lamp spoke to him. He started with surprise. The man was rather short, with sunken features, a very large nose, and a shawl round his neck; he was a youngish man with narrow shoulders like a girl's. He wanted Fritz to buy a revolver from him.

The good God does really provide for everyone . . .

Next day he took out of his employer's open safe two hundred mark notes. It was a terrible thing for him. It happened one quiet Tuesday evening when he had to work overtime; while the chief and his wife were reckoning up their accounts, with only their lips moving noiselessly, he went softly to the safe and took the money.

He went home later; on the way he thought he saw a man hanging from a lamp-post, but when he got nearer he saw that it was a girl leaning up against it—at first he thought it was Irma.

In his lodgings, on a table in the passage, there was a rolled-up towel and a letter with a black border. Someone had let the cat get into his room, and the basin of water which he had used that morning to wash in was still on the chair. He looked at himself in the mirror and thought:

"That's what a thief looks like!" But he did not feel

any shame, because he did not quite know why he had done it. When he had lighted the lamp his face in the mirror looked like a sad face behind a thick veil.

"How pale the wallpaper is!" he noticed.

The landlady knocked at the door and asked if the cat was there and whether he wanted his stove lighted.

"No, thank you!" he said. She went away again and the door closed. He changed quickly, wrote a few hurried lines to Irma to tell her that he was going to commit suicide, and that the only reason was that by chance he had come into possession of a revolver, and in any case why shouldn't he? He had loved her very much, and he still loved her, but he would never be able to keep her love, because she did not respect him; and he had nothing to live for apart from that—and, moreover, he owed it to a great many people in his own country that now at last he should die. He would never find Vassilii . . .

He locked his room, and on the stairs he met the landlady's little boy. "Tell your mother I'm going out of town!" he said to the boy, and then he went to the station and took a ticket for Berlin.

He arrived early in the morning, having travelled through the night. He had watched the landscape slipping by; he had been in a state of excitement—not exceptionally elated or sad, but for no particular reason so excited all the time that he felt his heart beating; he had also thought of his letter and of the postman who would bring it to Irma. Then he began to imagine that he had not really written the letter, that he had only intended to write it or dreamed that he had written it; it was the dark mirror in that room with the light wallpaper which

had made him dream it. Was he, in fact, travelling to Berlin?

He looked out of the window; yes, he certainly was in a train making for Berlin; it was night, and the moon shone silver on a small stream; then came a wood, and the moon was only an ugly plate. There were two other passengers in the compartment—an old woman who was asleep, and a young girl who was reading and who glanced at him from time to time. Suddenly he was compelled to think of Irma, and it made him want to scream; but that passed quickly—it was as if he had swallowed it down. Soon he fell into conversation with the full-bosomed, blonde girl; when something fell they both stooped down to pick it up, and their hands touched each other: it seemed to warm him up and make him very happy, and he began to get passionately fond of the girl. But this feeling, too, slipped away like the landscape outside. "One can't hold on to anything," he thought; "everything goes, and it's right it should go, because everything brings only misfortune to everybody; it is always the same."

He fell asleep.

When he woke up the train had reached the station; the old woman and the girl had gone, and the gas was out; the air was fresh and cold, and it brought him to his senses in a moment. He made his way to a first-class hotel and ordered a room with a bath. As he pulled out a hundred-mark note straight away, to pay in advance—because, he explained, he might be called away suddenly—they let him have a room in spite of his shabby clothes and although he had no luggage.

He went up to his room, telephoned down for some

wine, and prepared himself for death. But he found it not so easy as it had been once when he was a boy; when he tried to force himself to think seriously about it, fear and anguish overwhelmed him.

He sat down, but the room seemed to him to be too big to die in, and he got up and locked the door of the bathroom so that he could think better. There was a mirror in the door of the cupboard, and in order not to have to go on staring at it until he lost consciousness he also turned out the light. Then he groped his way back to the table, picked up the bottle, and in the darkness drank three glasses straight after each other; the sensation of the hard, delicate glass against his lips brought tears to his eyes. Now he was not so clear in his head: that was a good thing! He took the revolver in his right hand and sat down. Then the nerves of his body began to twitch; it was not fear now, but something much more intense than fear: his whole body, his back, his knees, the hairs on his neck—they were all crying out for life, for mercy. His left hand closed convulsively—it seemed to do it independently of his will. It was terrible—he no longer had any control, and his limbs no longer did what he wanted; they were all twitching convulsively. His body was wet with sweat—as he held the revolver he felt the sweat on his hand . . . "What terrible torture!" he thought; he tried to shout out "Light! Stop!"—for it was horribly dark—but neither his mouth nor his voice responded. The sweat was pouring incessantly from his right hand—then he raised it—it rose itself—he managed to raise it. Then his only feeling was "I must . . . I must . . ."

His hand did not reach the level of his temple; it

could not rise so far . . . yes, that was his heart; he could already feel that he was sinking into a swoon—his limbs were drooping and his head fell back . . . Then in the last part of a second he fired against his heart. He felt a thundering blow, a crash. Suddenly it seemed to him that all his life till now he had been listening to the murmuring of the waves. Now it was still.

He fell from his chair, and the revolver fell out of his hand. The glass fell over and broke to pieces.

They burst in, lights were turned on, and the porter was called. The hotel guests pressed into the room and were forced back. One of the directors came, and a doctor, the housemaid, and the police.

After a short time Fritz became conscious again, and it was terrible for him; it had not been his heart at which the revolver had been aimed—the bullet had hit the large mirror on the cupboard door. The mirror was splintered in every direction, but the central hole made by the bullet was at the place where his heart would have been as he sat in his chair by the table. They arrested him and took him to police headquarters in the Alexanderplatz; there he refused to answer enquiries as to his identity, and so they took it for granted that he was someone who was "wanted" by the police, and he was detained. Here he was left alone and was able to think things out.

Next morning he asked to be brought before the examining magistrate, and he was taken in to him.

The examining magistrate, Dr. Karl Heinemann, was sitting at the same table at which Fritz had left him a few months before. The room had the same lifeless, bright green-patterned carpet; the two little windows

with the cruciform moulding opened out, as before, on to leafless branches. In the high shelves round the walls there were vast numbers of dust-covered blue folders. There was a faint smell of cigars in the room, but no one was smoking.

"Well," said the magistrate, "so we meet again. It's a bad business, my dear friend, a bad business! Take a seat!"

While he was speaking he looked intently at his finger-nails; now and then he raised his eyes quite unexpectedly and glanced at Fritz. Each time that he did this the clerk gave a violent start.

"That's the chap," Fritz thought, "the chap who was with Friedel . . ."—and he said aloud to Dr. Heinemann:

"I beg you, sir, to have me set free at once. Or is there going to be any charge against me?"

The magistrate blinked at him with a smile.

"But, my friend, why did you refuse to tell the police who you were?"

"Because I wanted to speak to you, sir!"

Heinemann's smile vanished.

"But that's nonsense, Mr.—Mr.—what's your name . . .?"

"Semiovski. Fritz Semiovski."

"Of course, yes——"—and to the clerk: "Get out the file of this man's case, November or December last year, and look up the details."

The clerk disappeared, and the magistrate turned again to Fritz:

"If you wanted to speak to me, you could have come and seen me privately; I'm sorry, Semiovski, but I can't believe that was your motive! You must have realised how small a chance there was that out of the hundred

examining magistrates I should be the one to deal with your case again. So you had better tell me . . . !"

Fritz answered slowly, as if he were thinking:

"That is so, sir. When the police brought me here, at first just to keep me quiet, I got the idea that I might take the risk . . ."

"And if you had been brought before some other magistrate?"

"Then I'd have been unlucky; I'd have dropped it . . ."

The magistrate swallowed down something which he was just going to say. The clerk came in with the papers.

"Give the particulars to the police and ask them if any charge is to be made. If not, I must let the man go. Look sharp about it!"

"All right, all right, I'm going," the clerk grumbled. The magistrate had spoken in a low voice so that Fritz should not hear. The clerk shambled off again.

"Well, what was it you wanted of me?" Dr. Heinemann asked, folding his arms as if he expected a speech.

"What I wanted . . . !" Fritz said reflectively. "I wanted to tell you something. You are one of the few people—I'll be quite frank—you are the only person who has talked to me about a problem of existence of which keeps me alive. In Germany—excuse my saying so—people as a rule will only talk about problems which don't matter to anyone. They will never talk about problems which do concern someone—such things are regarded as mere phrases. You must excuse me . . ."

"Yes, but . . . !" the magistrate began, but Fritz interrupted him.

"Last time we discussed an important matter. You're bound to remember what it was. I've thought of some-

thing bearing on it . . ."

"What matter was that . . . ?"

Heinemann's face was completely blank.

"What, you haven't forgotten what we talked about?"

The magistrate laughed.

"But, my dear friend! Do you expect me to remember that still? What was it, then?"

Fritz felt deeply wounded, and was silent for a moment; then he said:

"Look here, sir, that, too, is a terrible peculiarity of the German people—they talk about the most important things, the ultimate things, if anyone starts them off, and they talk on and on, and afterwards they forget all about it. But we ought to live up to what we say—if we say anything—don't you think that's so?"

"Excuse me, I don't . . ." Heinemann began to protest, but just then the clerk came in and whispered something in his ear. The magistrate got up at once, just a little too hurriedly.

"Yes, so you're a free man, Mr. Semiovski; there is no charge whatever against you . . ."

Fritz also got up.

"What I wanted to tell you, sir, is that there's only one way to be good and happy . . ."

"Very interesting," the little man interrupted; he was no longer really listening, and without looking up he began to put some papers straight on his desk—"and what is the way?"

"To be a criminal, sir!"

"What?"

The magistrate stopped fumbling with his papers, and looked up in astonishment.

"You want to know why? It's because only criminals can atone for what they make others suffer!"

He swung round and went out. The magistrate stood there for a moment, with a blank look on his face; then he said a couple of times: "What nonsense! What nonsense!"

"These Communists!" the clerk muttered deprecatingly; he decided to go to Friedel that evening.

Fritz stood in the street.

It's really remarkable, he thought, that the chief hasn't taken any steps yet about the money!

This thought worried him and weighed on his mind, and by degrees the uncertainty began to irritate him. As they had let him go, his employer couldn't have notified the police. Why hadn't he? The question worried him. Had it been philanthropy? Kindness? He tried to picture the man to himself: his face, of the wide, easy-going type, with its unmistakably kind eyes. Could it be believed that this man would refrain from reporting a theft to the police, just out of kindness?

He felt that his whole mind was struggling against such an assumption—he kept on thinking it over. He found the uncertainty so trying that next day—he had taken a room in a little hotel near the Anhalter Station—he went repeatedly to the police headquarters, and looked enquiringly at the officials on their job, standing about where they could not help seeing him. But nothing happened; no one made the slightest response.

After some time an idea occurred to him. He went round to the examining magistrate's office and waited there for hours, until he saw Dr. Heinemann leaving the building. Fritz walked towards him, pretending not to

see him. When the magistrate noticed Fritz, he called out to him:

"Hullo, Semiovski!"

Fritz looked up, pretending that he only then recognised who it was; and at the same time he felt frightened, and cursed his own curiosity—he was now in their hands, if they were really looking for him.

He went up to the magistrate, and said defiantly:

"Is there anything against me again, Dr. Heinemann, that you should do me the honour of speaking to me?"

Dr. Heinemann did not notice the tone in which it was said; he thought to himself: he's a peculiar fellow, but there's certainly something in him; he might come with me a bit of the way—he's quite an interesting chap, and he'll talk to me on the way.

He said:

"But, my friend, what's put that into your head? After all, I'm a private individual as well as a magistrate. Come along with me for a part of the way—have you time for a few minutes?"

"It's an honour for me, Dr. Heinemann," Fritz answered, coming up on the magistrate's left.

"Tell me," Dr. Heinemann began, "why is it you're such a horrible pessimist? It's awful! You must take up some sport, and go for excursions, and get to know some decent people—my God, it's absurd to be always racking your brains and worrying over these great humanitarian ideas! You should leave that sort of thing to people in intellectual occupations, who get paid for it! We're living in an age of unexampled progress and immense technical achievement. My dear man, you ought to take up gymnastics, or get a couple of months at sea, so that you

get some healthy air up your nose—that will do you good! Read Jack London and Joseph Conrad: there you'll find that wild, glorious life in which it's your muscles that count, strength and determination . . ."

The little man, who was almost deformed, talked himself into a state of enthusiasm, and his voice cracked over and over again. He paused, and Fritz, who had been considering what to say, answered slowly:

"Yes, Dr. Heinemann, I'll answer your point. In the first place, no man can change his skin, and each of us is just what something intangible has made him. Secondly, I have read some of Jack London's books, but they began to bore me when I read more than a couple of them, and unless I've made a mistake, he—Jack London—in his autobiography *Martin Eden,* finishes up with suicide, and very likely something of the sort actually did happen. Thirdly, Dr. Heinemann, I also have been through that wild, glorious life you were talking about; I've worked with my hands at many trades, and besides, I was in the war. Fourthly, I want to tell you that what you say about life is an absurd but terrible deception, invented either by those who don't know life—like yourself—or by those who have grown up in such a secure social environment that they have never suffered very, very much for the want of five pfennigs—they've never had any cares, they laugh and they are always sure of themselves . . . There's also a third type of these deceivers, and they're in the majority—they are the innumerable fools, the hangers-on, the babblers, the readers of books, the hero-worshippers, the respectable citizens. That, Dr. Heinemann, is my answer! Do you think that I'd take a weight off my conscience, if I had one, by doing gym-

nastics? No, you yourself don't believe that: you only think that I'd *forget my conscience!* As man to man, is that true or not? It's those people who have an interest in seeing that the masses forget their conscience—it's they who have invented this 'life,' this enjoyment of nature, this enjoyment of one's own body. It's we who are the fools that get taken in by it—and you too will be one of the fools . . ."

"But what do you want?" the magistrate cried, flushing scarlet, and in such a loud voice that people looked round.

". . . what do I want? I want for once to be happy! And I'll only be that when I'm not causing pain to anyone else. Do you know, I was once at a dance place, and I went up to a whore, and she turned me down. I have never forgotten it. I thought then and I still think: is my face so ugly? I thought then and I still think: people don't want me . . ."

The magistrate, who had recovered control of himself, interrupted: "My God, what's that you're saying? You're a serious pathological case!"

". . . criminals pay the price for what they do, but we other men don't. Take an example, Dr. Heinemann—I'm talking to you here, and I irritate you; when you get home now you'll be grumpy with your servant-girl, and she'll answer you back cheekily, and you'll decide to punish her for it and you won't let her have her night out to-night. And her friend will wait for her in vain this evening; then he'll get annoyed, and he'll go off with someone else. Your maid will be unhappy, and so it goes on . . . you can picture it to yourself. Ah, what *can* we do about it . . . ?"

"But you're crazy!" the magistrate said—"hey, taxi!"

A taxi pulled up, and he got in, telling the driver his address. "Hope you'll be better soon!" he shouted to Semiovski in an angry sarcastic tone. Fritz made a face at him.

The magistrate drove home. He had no key with him, and he was obliged to ring. As no one answered for some time, he began knocking and ringing again. When the servant at last appeared, with her face crimson, he was just about to vent his rage on her—but he suddenly stopped before he had uttered a word, and went in without saying anything. The girl was astonished, but he did not find fault with her that day, or ever again; and once he asked her whether she had a young man. She wondered why his treatment of her had changed, and by degrees she began to take greater and more frequent liberties. The magistrate's wife grew more and more annoyed about it, as her husband would neither find fault with the girl nor was he prepared to dismiss her; and he would not even let his wife say anything to her. And so the magistrate's home became more and more uncomfortable—but his office became more and more pleasant, and his clerk was able to do just as he liked. In the course of time Dr. Heinemann's household fell more and more into disorder, and he realized that he was creating unhappiness by his decisions in court just as he was causing unhappiness at home. Finally, long before the statutory age for retiring, he applied for his pension; which was granted. But that was four years later.

Fritz could not endure this state of uncertainty any longer, and he went to Hamburg; but there too he was not arrested. Finally he lost his nerve, and decided to

tempt fate; so he went to his former place of employment. His heart was beating hard when he opened the door of the shop, not from fear of the police, or in any case not so much from fear of them as from the dread that the old man might have forgiven him, out of philanthropy.

As Fritz had had to pay for the broken mirror in Berlin, he had spent a hundred marks of the money; but as he had saved about as much he had on him the full two hundred marks.

He went in, and immediately he was back again in the atmosphere of that dark shop, blocked up with boxes which smelt strongly of soap. There was only one dim light, over the desk at which the old man was sitting. It was quiet and peaceful, as if nothing had altered—as if those terrible days and nights had never been. What had happened was like a dark, evil dream . . . His former employer swung round on his revolving chair, looked at him and said nothing but:

"So there you are again! Well, how are you now?"

The blood rushed to Fritz's head—he had not been expecting this! The old man made him feel ashamed—really ashamed; so after all there was something like kindness, which was not purely egoism, as with all those others. He stammered:

"Mr. . . . ."—but the chief would not let him say anything—he got down from his chair and came towards him; Fritz saw his kindly, pink face with its bright friendly eyes coming closer—closer—quite close.

". . . not arrest me? Not shout for help? Not fly at me like a devil? Be kind? Be kind?"

Fritz stammered meaningless words—his soul was moved and laid bare to its depths; he wept, caught the

old man's white hand in his and kissed it, stroked it—". . . like a father—God!—like a father . . . " he sobbed. It had overwhelmed him that anyone could be kind.

The old man felt embarrassed—it was very touching, and he tried to be gruff in order to master his emotion, but he could not manage it.

"It's all right," he said, "now calm yourself! . . . We don't chuck a man out or make any fuss over such a small matter! My God, you're a stout enough fellow at other times; but you might have written a line or two, or you could easily have telephoned—my wife would have sent you some good soup. You're all right again now, aren't you?"

He went on speaking with pauses between his sentences, as Fritz was still silent.

Suddenly Fritz gave a start—"Soup? Soup? Why soup?" he asked.

"Oh yes, soup?! My wife knows how to make it, she's fattened up many a sick man with her soup before now . . ."

"Sick . . . ? So you think I was delirious . . ."

It was getting too much for the old man.

"Well, then, let's get to work now, eh? You're fit again, aren't you? You must stay in the shop a couple of days . . ."

Fritz nodded without comprehending.

". . . because," the old man went on, "I've had to clear Emma out; she's been stealing, the little beast, though we'd trusted her . . ."

Fritz screamed, and seized his employer's arm.

"She's been stealing? *What* had she stolen?"

"Now then," the chief said disapprovingly, shaking off

Fritz's grip and stepping back a pace; then he seemed to think better of it, and he became friendly again.

"She took two hundred marks . . . that surprises you, eh? As if the money's so easily earned . . ."

He did not go on, because Fritz collapsed.

"In God's name, man . . ." his employer cried; Fritz pulled himself together, and though he was still reeling a little he managed to stand up, and he said in a hoarse toneless voice:

". . . so Emma stole, did she? Did she own up to it?"

"No, it was a damned unpleasant business. The police had to let her go, because nothing could be proved against her; she must have put it away pretty smartly. But anyway, thanks be to God, she's out of the house, and now she's on the streets somewhere. God knows where she's put the money, just think of it! A girl wrecks her life like that just for a paltry two hundred marks. That is to say," he added with a smile, "not exactly paltry . . ."

Fritz held out his hand.

"Here is the money, I took it and now I've brought it back to you again."

"And both of us"—he said to his employer, who was literally speechless, with the smile frozen on his pink cheeks (Fritz saw that it had always been like that)—"both of us now have Emma on our conscience!"

He put the money down on a case and was just going off when something suddenly occurred to him. He turned round and whispered into the old man's ear:

"God bless you!"

He walked away, opened the door of the shop; and did not turn round again. In an instant he was in the midst

of the bustling life of the street. He closed the door behind him, and the old man's petrified face had vanished.

He walked home and went quietly to his room. He was terribly tired, and he lay down on his bed and was asleep in a moment. And he had the following dream:

He was sitting in that room in the Berlin hotel. He had shot himself, and now he recovered consciousness. There were people round him, staring at him—a young man with a scar was looking at him sympathetically; a white-haired old woman in black silk pyjamas, with a pattern of golden birds whose eyes and mouths were tightly shut, was looking at him voluptuously; one policeman was looking inquisitively, another angrily and disapprovingly —they were all staring at him and coming nearer to him all the time—their faces got gigantic in front of him, like close-ups on the screen.

He gradually came to himself; he recovered consciousness and found that he was not wounded. A waiter and a housemaid examined the room, while a doctor examined him and a policeman examined the revolver. At last they stopped their investigations and the policeman said in a resounding voice: "The bullet left the barrel, a shot was fired, and then the door had to be forced. On the other hand, no trace of the bullet has been found in the room, and this man is untouched. The bullet cannot have flown through the window, for both double windows are not only closed, but also covered with curtains."

Then they let him go, and as he walked away he believed that he was really dead. He travelled back to Hamburg—the train shook and rattled—and then he went to his old room with the pale wallpaper. There a letter

was lying which his employer had written to him, telling him that he should just come back to the shop again and start a new life, that all was forgiven and forgotten. From now on he was not to push a barrow any more, but sit at a desk and reckon up and write under a little yellow lamp, for he—his employer—was a philanthropist.

"He is really a philanthropist—but such a stupid one, so fearfully stupid, that he doesn't see that I'm dead!"—Fritz thought. All at once he noticed that his mirror was cracked.

He sat on his bed while the twilight gradually deepened, and he did not light the gas, even when it grew quite dark; with the aid of the moonlight he saw his own face, pale and unsubstantial, in the broken mirror.

"I have time to think," he told himself; "I've shot myself; I can swear that, by everything I hold sacred; I remember it quite clearly, in every detail, so I can't be crazy. I aimed the bullet at my heart, and it couldn't be found; therefore, it must be in my heart. I am dead; I shall never again have to do anything that hurts people."

He was filled with happiness, with delirious joy.

So this is death!—he thought—you go on living, and people don't notice it. You die, and you don't rot—that was evidently a delusion. And now there's nothing more that I still have to atone for. How fabulous! . . How wonderful!

The moon faded out, and it grew dark; the mirror sank into the wall, and the pale face died away.

The following days and nights were like a delightful intoxication. The desk in tne dark shop under the little lamp was yellow, and he could dream there; when he

talked to himself with his lips moving quietly his employer thought that he was reckoning up, or considering his accounts; it was like a dreamy convalescence after a long, serious illness. He had a new girl—her name was Emma. The girl he once had known—what was her name was forgotten; this Emma was mild and stupid—she was very much in love with him; she did not understand anything he said, but believed everything he told her, and—to him it was the most important point—she respected him.

But he was all the time thinking, with a wan smile, that he was dead and that no one noticed it. He himself was always observing little signs that proved it: his absolutely white face in the mirror at night; words that woke him only to find that there was no one in the room. It chanced too that a strange man, whom he had never seen before, now met him every day and greeted him with a profound and respectful bow, but without a word. In the past, too, he had often had headaches, and now he no longer had them; his finger-nails and his toe-nails had stopped growing. He noted these signs as proof that he was dead, and he never caused suffering to anyone; for weeks on end he did not utter a word; he walked along the streets through all the people without their noticing it.

There was always the same stillness in the shop; only everyone's lips moved. Spring came, and summer, the sun shone fiercely, and his employer wore a thin, glossy alpaca coat. Then all of that too passed, and the glossy coat grew old and lost its brightness; "it's autumn," people said. Their lips moved; it was dark early, and none of them spoke much, whether they were alive or not.

When it was just a year since he had made his journey to Berlin doubts came into his mind, more and more doubts: were things to go on like this for ever, without anything happening? Was he really dead? All at once he lost his peace of mind, his resignation; for the second time he stole 200 marks, took a train to some big town, went to a good hotel and hanged himself with his belt. He was half in doubt whether there might not be some deeper form of death, and half in doubt whether he had ever been really dead, and he was so consumed with curiosity to know what the result would be that the business of hanging himself went through without his getting particularly excited over it. He lost consciousness, but soon after he was discovered by the police and cut down; his employer had put them on his track because of his second theft.

After he had served his sentence of imprisonment he went back to Hamburg. The lights of the town drew near in the night, and the train rolled like thunder into the station. He walked slowly through the streets, almost as if in a dream, till he reached the street in which he had lived; he went up the steps of the staircase, and stood at the door of the flat. Then he went into his room. It was late in the night, and in the distance someone was playing the piano—except for that, everything was quiet. Then by the light of the moon he looked at the spot where the mirror had hung; the space was empty, but the pale wallpaper reflected his face; then he felt that his heart broke and that he died.

It was all over.

When he woke up Irma was sitting by his bed; it was a bright spring morning.

She said: "Sh! Sh!"—and he obediently closed his eyes. Then he woke up again without Irma's noticing it. She was sitting by his bed and looking wistfully—so it seemed—out of the window. There was nothing to be seen through the window except the sky, which was rather bright and blue, with pretty little clouds in it. Irma was in nurse's dress; a lock of brown hair hung down from beneath her cap, and behind it he could see a little bit of her ear. As he looked at her like that he was filled with a solemn sense of peace, as on a Sunday morning—he did not move, but just went on looking at her.

"What *more* do I want?" he asked himself; he felt refreshed and peaceful . . .

". . . I'm thinking and being anxious and miserable over God knows what, and here there's a wonderful pure girl sitting, with a young heart full of child-like love and tenderness. And it's for me, it's all for me!"

And he made up his mind that from now on he would always be quiet and good and normal, that in the future he would avoid all thinking: that would be all right—it would certainly be all right; it just must be all right!

He raised his hand quite gently and took hers.

She started, pulled her hand away, and looked at him almost defensively.

"You did startle me, Fritz," she said.

But then she put her hand on his again, and she smiled, and fondled his hand.

"How do you feel?" she asked, still with a smile, but a slightly embarrassed smile, because his eyes were looking fixedly at her, and they were filled with tenderness and

love. He did not answer.

"How good!"—he thought, and he was happy and contented—"how good!"

He closed his eyes.

A little later she got up from the bed, sat on a chair and began to read a newspaper. She probably thought that he was asleep. But he was not sleeping; he was lying there quite awake, and he had opened his eyes again. He was looking at her and reflecting on how things were going to be now. He pictured it to himself, and already he saw how everything was going to turn out.

When he opened his eyes again, she was still sitting there reading—there was her dear, kind face!

"Have I been ill?" he suddenly asked aloud, breaking the stillness.

She put down the newspaper, and her face was smiling again, quite attractively—a minute ago it had still made him feel happy—and yet, though he immediately suppressed the idea, it made him think that her smile was like his employer's and like the smile of the whore of a recent night—each of them had their own kind of smile and yet their smiles were alike.

"No, my boy," she said, and she sat down by him again and ran her fingers immediately through his hair. "You've not been ill, you must have been over-exerting yourself, you've been sleeping four days and nights. You've been imagining some pretty queer things. Who is Emma, eh? You've been talking a lot about her!"

She went on stroking his head, without any sign of embarrassment. It made him so happy.

"Ah, you've heard wrong," he smiled; "I'm sure it was Irma I said . . ."

He was thinking: she is wearing her uniform, and it smells as if it's just been washed; she's no longer a woman, but a sick-nurse. But I don't want a sick-nurse!

He took her hand from his head and stroked it, holding her tiny hand between his great hands, and then he held her palm against his cheek, and all at once he began to kiss the palm. He looked at Irma challengingly.

Then she took her hand away, and her smile vanished. Her sweet face grew serious and rather embarrassed, and her cheeks flushed slightly.

"You must not do that!" she said.

He raised himself in his bed, and she shrank back; he could see that her face was rigid.

"What is it?" he cried. "Why do you go away? Come here to me!"

He held out both his arms towards her, and for a moment it seemed as if her face would light up with another smile, as if she wanted to come to him and forget everything. But that was only an illusion, for the next instant she drew back still further from him, and said in a voice which she tried to make firm:

"I came here, Fritz, because you weren't well, or I shouldn't have come at all. I did not intend to tell you just yet, but now I suppose I must: we can't have anything more to do with each other . . ."

He tried to control his feelings. When he was quite calm again, he asked in a low voice.

"Do you not love me any more?"—and as she said nothing, he went on: "There's no need to feel awkward about it . . ."

She came nearer to him, with some hesitation but a

little reassured by his calmness, and she began to speak in an eager voice, as if she were trying to make excuses for something

"Look, Fritz, I'm really very fond of you, and you can believe me when I say that; and there's no other man—but you see—there's really no purpose in it . . ."

". . . what? What?" he interrupted. "Why are you talking of any purpose? What has no purpose?"

His voice made her feel quite frightened; tears came into her eyes and she waved her fingers before she spoke —oh, how he loved her!

"Look," she said, "you're not able to marry me, are you?—and . . ."

"Well, and . . . ?"—he almost screamed.

"Well then, that's why there is no purpose in it. We must be sensible now. My parents . . ."

He looked at the girl. She was right. There could be no doubt that she was right. Anyone but an egoist like himself would have seen that from the start.

She stood there in front of him, fragile, unmoved, and a little self-reproachful, with her thin white fingers and her bright, red, commonplace mouth . . .

"Purpose!" he cried. "Must everything have a purpose? That terrible invention of the well-to-do! Purpose! Purpose! Purpose! But I *love* you! Is that nothing to you? I love you—do you hear? I love you! Love! I love you! Is that nothing? My passion—the most desolate misery in the world—my *life* . . . does all that mean nothing at all? Irma, Irma . . ." He broke down; he felt as if he could not bear it any longer.

There was a long pause; she was pale and silent. He sat up.

"But go," he said to her. "It is quite all right; I'll soon get over it, you just go!"

Fritz was left there alone.

"The world goes with her going," he thought. "All the bright, pure air, and the clear blue sky, and everything that's clean . . . Now, for me, there's only . . ."

Downstairs a door slammed: a tram rang its bell; he was completely alone. He felt as if someone had broken him in pieces.

In the morning he woke up, dressed himself and shaved, and then took the shoe out of his trunk. It was in shreds, dusty and shapeless—but it seemed still to have fragrance and warmth.

Fritz thought across the year that had passed . . . there was the shoe hanging on a ladder in a girl's gymnasium in Tula, in front of forty naked men . . .

He opened the window, and saw the town spread out in front of him. It was a glorious day; the roofs were bathed in sunlight, and children were playing with little balls in the street. He picked up the shoe and flung it through the window, as far as he could.

But at the moment when the shoe left his hand all his blood seemed to rush to his heart—he grew dizzy, and he had to hold the window-frame to keep himself up. Then he rushed like a madman out of the room and down the stairs and out into the street; he began to search here and there and everywhere, to find the shoe. He searched for it despairingly . . . but there was only a motor gliding by, and a cyclist ringing his bell, and the children, and

the unbearable glare of the sun. The shoe had gone, vanished like a ghost.

He went back to his room.

"It's all over with me," he thought.

His glance lighted on the paper which Irma had left. Perhaps she'll come back to fetch it, he thought.

And he began to listen to every step on the stairs—all that afternoon, that evening, the next day—for days and days—perhaps she would still come. When the bell of the front door rang his heart beat wildly. The servant girl shuffled along to the front door—slowly, my God, how slowly she was going!—and then she opened it, and then —a man's voice called out: "Morning—chimney-sweep!"

The girl muttered something, the door was shut, and her shuffling steps echoed along the passage.

He dropped on his bed, and wept. He screamed and sobbed—the tears seemed to be bursting out of his eyes. No one heard him. Someone was beating carpets outside. Irma did not come back.

He fell asleep with the paper pressed close to him, held in his arms as if it were something living. Then he opened his eyes, and they chanced to fall on a paragraph in the paper. This paragraph stated that, as already announced in the previous day's issue, Vassilii Lidin, the man who was wanted by the police on a charge of robbery with violence, had been arrested in the St. Pauli district and after a brief examination was being detained in gaol. After the preliminary investigation into his activities in Hamburg he would be transferred to Berlin for trial. The police were specially praised for their careful and expeditious work . . .

Fritz got up, and went out into the street. He asked his way to the Holstenplatz and enquired at the Criminal Court how he could get permission to have an interview with a prisoner under detention; it was a matter of importance. He was referred to the magistrate who was dealing with the case. Fritz waited in the corridor until he got hold of him, described himself as a countryman of the accused and stated that there were the most urgent reasons for his interviewing the prisoner. The magistrate asked for his name and address and told him that he would be advised by letter; then Fritz returned home. As he was hungry and had no money, he got his landlady to give him something to eat.

Two days later he received a permit to see the accused man at eleven o'clock the following morning; particulars were given as to where he should go.

This was to be the last night, he told himself. He went out into the street and walked aimlessly round. Now, when the "great secret" was about to be revealed, he was thrilled by the power of the divine purpose. To-morrow there would no longer be a secret. From to-morrow, life would have nothing new to offer. To-morrow . . .

This "to-morrow" was exciting, and at the same time disquieting. He asked himself sarcastically: What can there be that's so great in this "great secret"?

He had put this question to himself on innumerable occasions in the past, and he had considered innumerable possibilities, but had rejected them all, because the secret must be something still more bewildering, still more fantastic! Even if he could imagine what it was, even if anyone could imagine it, it would not be the true secret,

he thought to himself; it must be of such a kind that it would altogether change him, and give a new content to his life, or even give a new life to him. But perhaps, he sometimes thought, it was something banal—something that he had known for a very long time, some petty ridiculous thing . . .

But, whatever it was, it was floating above his head like a heavy black cloud, above which was God, to whom he had prayed in the cellar among the boxes. Whatever it might be, it was the only thing, he believed, which life still had to give him, the only thing life owed him. It was like a woman whom he desired beyond all things; but now he was afraid to possess her, because then his desire would no longer exist.

In his reflections he asked himself how this had happened. Everything must surely have a reason. And for what reason was he the embodiment of a generation of helpless people? Has the world really nothing more to tell us? People talk of views, philosophies, and ideals by which we live. I don't live by anything of the sort. If I were in fear of death, I should betray everything for life. It is not difficult to be good when a man is stupid or when Nature has given him blinkers in the form of an easy-going character. I have a weak longing for kindness and purity, which can only be called absurd. And what really distinguishes me from other people? In any case I haven't the courage to assert my personality; I should like to be one of all the others.

He was a young child swinging in his cradle while all of them were sleeping. It was absolutely still. He got up without making a noise, and went to Piotr's house. That little pointed face was his father's; the eyes were closed.

He went down on his knees in front of that little pointed face, and fell asleep. Old Piotr nudged him: "Your mother." He went and found her lying by the crucifix; there was snow on her face and on her hands. She said: "The squire!"—so it was the squire! He ran and ran—he was only a child; my God! Still only a child—through the silent forest on which lay snow and eternal darkness and solitude, until he came to a house built of stone. It was night, and he went along quietly on tiptoe. He flung himself against door; and then, there was the squire in the darkness, like a monster, naked—a nightmare beast; he must be made to have a murder on his conscience! The fight began. Then when it was all over, someone whispered: ". . . there is a great secret!"

The mirror kept shining at Fritz out of the darkness; it disturbed him, and so he jumped up and took it down, and pushed it under the washstand.

He lay awake for a long time. During the night he noticed the tender stirrings of spring—low cries, fragrant smells, the rustling of clothes, and faint, lingering footsteps in the streets. His landlady was sitting in the next room playing the piano; Fritz beat furiously on the wall, and the music broke off at once; then the silence was profound.

Next morning he took his good suit to the pawnbroker's, and he also pawned everything else he had except the clothes he was wearing. He drank some hot black coffee in a café; at ten o'clock he got up from the table. The clock seemed to be going terribly slowly. He was in a state of great excitement.

He walked slowly in the direction of the great square,

where the Criminal Courts were situated. He was perfectly clear as to what he had to do, for all night he had been dreaming that he was in the long corridor which led to the prisoners' cells, walking up and down; it was a very long corridor, simple and business-like in its appearance, and absolutely empty. Along one side ran iron bars and behind them Vassilii was standing all the time—silent, and with his hands and face pressed against the bars. Fritz tried to go nearer to him, but terror of the "great secret" drove him back; he turned round and saw on the other side a gigantic mirror, in which he saw himself, and, over and over again, behind his back, Vassilii's face. He screamed and woke up, fell asleep again and had the same dream, and so it went on, waking up, falling asleep, and dreaming the whole night through.

It was a quarter to eleven. That was the building with the fountain in front of it.

He went in; it was cold inside, and dark and bustling. A great many people were hurrying along, doors slammed, and people shouted out things.

He reached the corridor which he knew existed, but there was no mirror in it, whichever way he turned; and neither Vassilii nor anyone else was standing behind the grating. Men in lawyers' robes were walking up and down the corridor, gesticulating as they talked; one of them was speaking to a woman, who was crying, and while she was wiping her eyes the man took a hurried glance at his gold watch.

Fritz stood near the iron bars; there was a bell-push just by them. All at once he felt giddy, and he had to hold on to something—to the bars.

And now—he thought—I am standing just as I dreamed Vassilii was standing, with his hands clutching the bars . . .

With his last remaining strength he pushed the bell, and one of the officials appeared. Fritz gave him the permit without a word, and the official vanished in the direction of the cell where Vassilii was confined. They had asked Vassilii the day before whether he wanted to see the man who had been enquiring for him, and Vassilii had expressed his willingness to see Fritz; so now they went to fetch him. Vassilii had had a very bad night. He had been thinking to himself: so Feodor Nikolaievich Semiovski is coming; he's still alive, then; he's survived all that terrible time. What will he look like—Feodor Nikolaievich Semiovski?

When he had seen him last—he could see him now quite clearly as he was then—Feodor had looked like someone who knew a great deal and would know a great deal more, but would still remain a stupid youngster. In the prison the nights were dark and still; there was only now and then the soft sound of water gurgling in the hot-water pipes which ran along the floor. Apart from this sound it was absolutely quiet—the kind of quiet in which one thinks one can hear the most distant sounds, such as someone breathing in another cell, although there is a solid wall eighteen inches thick between the cells. But when it is as still as this, even breathing in the next cell seems audible; there is someone lying on a bed there, and beyond him another man is lying, and still further on there is another. There is a whole row of these silent men; none of them can sleep, and each one hears breathing and whispering and rustling; the heavy black doors are closed,

and the tiny barred windows, high up near the ceiling, have been completely blotted out by the darkness.

Vassilii, a Russian farm-servant whose faith was limited to what he thought was above him, and who was crafty in his dealings with those whom he thought his inferiors—Vassilii was thinking of his home; and he cried with home-sickness over each tree which blossomed in his dream, each tree which he knew so well. He remembered little servant girls and narrow-minded babblers; but now he was lonely and helpless; for he had found Sossia, and it was she who had betrayed him to the police.

It was impossible not to laugh at this simple-minded fellow who had left his home and gone to the war, who had toiled at learning to read and write until it had made him quite ill; who at the risk of his life had fled from the camp where he was interned; who had suffered hunger and had walked without shoes or food as far as Warsaw; who had known want and had committed murder in Berlin. This man, who after committing a murder (it was not his fault that the other man was still alive) could get toothache, and at whom one simply could not help laughing, had done and suffered everything in order to find his pure little sweetheart Sossia—Sossia, whom he thought of as pure, as his Madonna. He had followed her to Hamburg, and searched for her, and only for her, from morning to night. He had money enough to live in an economical way, and enough also for his friend Schubert, who shared a room with him.

Schubert was a member of the Wandervogel League; he looked very honest and he was always very healthy; he had no inhibitions of any kind in his mind; and his pronunciation showed that he came from Saxony, although

he would never admit it. He had worked at various trades—as a packer and a railwayman—but he could never stick it out for very long. He was one of the innumerable commonplace youngsters who constitute the young proletariat in every State, and think themselves the centre of everything that happens.

". . . after all, my name is not so unknown"—he would say, and the way he said it was enough to show his character; but the statement itself was true, for in fact there was not a single Wandervogel group in Germany which did not know Schubert. Later on the Wandervogel League split into two organisations, the members of which were generally at loggerheads with each other. Schubert, of course, belonged to the opposition minority group, so that he could display his indignation over the fact that he was poor; and because he liked to get indignant over questions of ideals. He believed up to a point in the ideals of the Youth Movement; he ate uncooked food, and neither smoked nor drank. Sometimes he had a hard struggle with his own desires, for he had vowed to himself to remain chaste until he married. The days and evenings passed by these young people were strange. They met together for "Nest evenings," in which they had earnest and enthusiastic discussions on social, moral or literary questions; sometimes they would sing to the guitar, and they always behaved quite freely and without any reserve, for they formed a commune, which after all has no object except to be a commune. Later on—in the middle twenties—the discussions began to lose their charm; the pictures of naked young men sweeping across crags in the sunlight were taken down from the walls; the books about the holiness of motherhood were shamefacedly hidden away—

but still the intimate kindly feeling of brotherhood remained. They did everything to harden themselves, wore clothes which they thought were more in keeping with Nature, and used to go out on glorious excursions which filled them with poetry and vigour.

Schubert was a member of this movement, though he was rather older than most of the others. He knew, not consciously—for there was very little conscious dishonesty among these young people—but nevertheless quite clearly and instinctively, that if he left the League he would be isolated and helpless, he would be treated as a crank and people would laugh at him. And so he went on going about with his narrow zealous energy, with his fair hair and his bare knees and his honest enthusiasm for everything which he thought good; he was above all else a comrade, one who stuck to his circle, and was always friendly, and who knew all the phrases of the Youth Movement. And so he had made his way to Hamburg and with his naturally limited vision he had seen a comrade in Vassilii; they shared a room, and they had tremendously serious discussions. They used in particular to discuss the question of God, for it was one of the accepted characteristics of the Wandervogel that they denied the existence of God. In place of God they took to Goethe's nature-worship, which someone had once picked up and which was now current in a special form.

Schubert took Vassilii once to one of their "Nest evenings"; they went to a tiny overheated room in the fourth story of a lodging-house. This was the room of a keen fair-haired girl, who gave piano lessons; it was brightly lit up; there were flowers, and the curtains were nice;

there were bright pretty pictures on the walls; the furniture was bright; there were a great many cushions, and everything was comfortable. Eight or ten young people were there, most of them on cushions on the floor, and they greeted Vassilii in a brotherly, matter-of-fact way, asking no questions and showing no surprise; they shook hands with him, for whoever came with Schubert was a comrade. Vassilii felt as if he had been suddenly plunged into the midst of a large family; at first he was a little confused, but then a comfortable, happy, languid feeling overcame him—no doubt partly because of the warmth of the room, which made his ears burn. He felt that he was among good people, who were not trying to do him any harm; they left him in peace, but they respected him—he was one of them.

These young people all looked remarkably alike; their faces were fair, and their eyes seemed to be slightly squinting inwards, like the eyes of horses which have worn blinkers for a long time; and they all had the same blunt expression of energy and confidence about their mouths—they looked as if they knew what they wanted. The girls wore their hair twisted round over their ears, or in pigtails with a firm, straight parting on the top of their heads; they had long plain knitted clothes, with sandals, and they walked with long steps. The young men, like Schubert, had very long and smooth fair hair, and they wore a kind of blouse.

They were singing; someone began a song and others joined in, but some did not sing, and one of them played a guitar. Schubert was talking in low tones with a sturdily-built, rather fat girl with mild brown eyes; her name was Else.

The song was about three beeches in a meadow; when it came to an end, the girl put a question to Vassilii, and he jumped with surprise.

"You believe in God?"

Until then Vassilii had been quite happy as an unnoticed member of that kindly family; now everyone was looking at him, and it made him uncomfortable. He answered in an embarrassed voice:

"Yes—yes—of course!"

His slow dialect was very attractive. The girl screwed up her velvet eyes and asked another question:

"Then do you also believe in the immortality of the soul?" When Vassilii had again replied in the affirmative, she raised her voice—she was the leader of the circle—and said:

"Then we'll talk to-night about the immortality of the soul. Who believes in it?"

She looked round the room with a threatening air, fixing her eyes on one after the other of them, and it seemed as if the girls wanted to leave the discussion to the lads, and the lads seemed one and all to be in love with their girl leader, though they would never have admitted, either to themselves or to her, that they had such "bourgeois" sensations.

No one ventured to believe in the immortality of the soul when her eyes were on him; so finally her eyes came to rest on Vassilii:

"But you do?"

"Yes, yes . . ."

"And—why do you?"

Now, Vassilii thought, I'll tell them; and with an air of importance he began:

"You see, the soul must go somewhere when we die! The Lord God gives us a soul; and the fact that we die shows that He always takes it away from us again; and the fact that people are always being born shows that He always gives it back to us . . ."

"Of course that's nonsense!" Else interrupted him impatiently. "We young people must free ourselves from this misleading doctrine. I'll put this question to you. What is the evidence that you have a soul at all?"

Vassilii, rather abashed, replied:

"Well, I feel, and I think, and I'm alive . . ."

"Good, you feel! What do you feel? For example, you feel sorrow when someone dies whom you have liked. And that, I suppose, is your soul expressing itself?"

"Yes . . ."

"But you can't either see or hear that this person whom you liked is dead—or in any case you can only become aware of it through your senses, isn't that so?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"But if you had neither ears to hear with nor eyes to see, you could not tell whether this person was dead, and so you couldn't feel any sorrow either; that is to say, if your physical sense-organs did not exist, your soul couldn't function, isn't that so?"

"Yes," said Vassilii, rather overcome, "that is really true!"

"So, then, when you are dead, your soul no longer has the possibility of functioning! Consequently, there is no such thing as the soul continuing to live after death!"

She looked round triumphantly; one or other of them advanced one or two objections, but she had given the essence of the matter, and finally they had nothing more

to say—a state to which Vassilii had been reduced a long while before.

Is it possible? he thought; so there's no such thing as a soul!

He had not altogether understood what the girl had said, but no doubt she was right.

Just look at her! he thought, and he fixed his eyes on Else—her wide hips, her dreamy dark eyes and her fair hair. Half sitting and half lying, she was leaning against the knees of another girl, who was sitting on a chair and stroking her head.

All at once Vassilii thought: I should like to have her!

And he screwed up his eyes and spread out his hands and observed her intently, her whole body. Then she noticed it and blushed a deep red, but Vassilii still continued to look at her. After a while she got up rather hesitatingly, stood in front of him and looked down at him.

"What do you want, then?" she asked. He did not answer, but just looked at her with a sly smile and winked. She turned round brusquely and went away.

Very late that night he was walking home with Schubert. They were quite silent. Vassilii would have liked to talk about women; he suddenly felt that he must. But it was impossible to talk to Schubert on this subject—to Schubert or any of those others. Hadn't they the least bit of feeling—well, for a woman . . .

He said good night to Schubert; he himself was going to walk round a bit. Then he took a tram to St. Pauli. He went along a wide street which was alternately bright and dark; it was like a strange land to him, a land that made his blood run more quickly. Every girl had an attractive

face, and made him feel excited, and every man was a man—not like those scarecrows whom he had just left. The commissionaires certainly knew a great many exciting things, although they were yawning and drawling their announcements in monotonous tones. The hot air which streamed out of the taverns when the doors opened brought with it scraps of music, the hushed voices of men whispering, the enticing laughter of girls, and light . . .

He was on the look-out for a girl.

He was walking along at a street corner where an old woman with newspapers was sitting in the darkness. Her legs were long and they were encased in bright-coloured stockings and boots which almost reached to her knees. As she passed him, he saw her red lips—she is certainly very warm, he thought; it was very cold. He was just going up to her, and she was standing there and smiling, when another girl came by, walking quickly, and without a glance at him. He knew that walk, he thought. She had already passed him, and then he swung round with his head reeling, and cried breathlessly, in such a way that everyone looked round at him: "Sossia!" She turned round, stood still a moment, and then came slowly towards him.

It was Sossia!

He felt that he must go to her, and do God knows what —cast himself at her feet or in front of a tram, so that he would be killed, or drown himself in the harbour—he must do something absolutely unique. Something of the sort that people don't forget.

He felt that the world was vast, an immense glass ball full of suffering, with God over it all.

I have her! I have found her!

He felt terribly tired.

Instead of all the things he thought of doing he just held out his hand to her and, swaying from side to side like a drunken man, he said:

"Well, here you are!"

So Sossia was here; he held her hand in his own warm hands. She had long since forgotten him; he was something in the distant past, like her birthplace and the wood by the village, the wretched peasant huts, and all the immense, holy Russian land; at first the only thought she had was:

"A man!"—and that meant a night in a warm room and a round silver five-mark piece!

Bad luck had dogged her footsteps; fate had not been kind to her. After fleeing from the village she had gone to join her relations in Warsaw, and after the conclusion of hostilities they—her uncle and aunt and herself—had gone to Berlin: they were Poles, pious, virtuous and greedy to get money. It was the period of inflation; everyone, even Sossia, was infected with the passion to make money, and they picked it up in all sorts of ways. Then suddenly her uncle died, and the inflation came to an end.

She and her aunt were poor and it was cold. Her aunt was a severe old woman with a straight parting to her hair; she was very strict with her niece, who did not at all like doing without enjoyment. Then one day, with an artist friend who earned a lot of money, Sossia robbed her aunt and took away all her money and the few trinkets she had, and left the old woman to starve. When the artist reproached her for leaving her aunt like that, she laughed at him, at his childish heart, as she put it—she laughed so much, with her deep and incredibly attractive, guttural

laugh, that he forgot everything else and thought to himself:

"What does it matter to me! But Sossia—she's enchanting"; and he rushed to her.

She came with him to Hamburg, and here their impetuous happiness came to an end. The artist realised that a girl like Sossia was too exacting in all kinds of ways, and that she was entirely lacking in what artists need more than anything else from their wives—she had no soul and she was quite unable to give him any real love or any real help. After he had left her Sossia began to live on the money she had stolen and on what he had left behind, and she went on like that quite unconcernedly until her landlady gave her notice to quit her room if she could not manage to find any more rent: after all, she was a pretty girl, and she could probably earn quite a lot in a very easy way. "What way do you mean?" Sossia asked with a laugh; and that evening she was introduced to the simple trade of a prostitute. Then the gleam came back to her eyes again, and the element of chance in this form of trade, which for her always ended with enjoyment, besides the money the men gave her, began to interest her like some form of sport.

It was always interesting to guess in advance which one of the many types of men would be with her that night; and she came across the most incredible and remarkable types. She had the will to live, and she was quite content with her new profession; it was always exciting, and the result was always satisfactory in every respect.

But after she had been plying this trade for a few weeks she began to be bored by the constant feeling that she *must* go out on the streets, and the perpetual sameness of

her life. It was becoming colder, too, out on the streets, and there were many evenings when she had no luck; and it was on such an evening, when she had already given up hope, and was on her way home, that she met Vassilii, her lover of ten years before. She had grown taller and stouter, and her face was a little harder and better kept; her auburn hair was long and waved, and her eyes were large and beautiful; her mouth was wide; her fat lips pouted a little, and her cheeks were thickly painted and powdered.

The moment she saw Vassilii and recognised him, a number of ideas came into her head, and afterwards she put these ideas into operation.

She soon realised that Vassilii was leading a very comfortable life, although he did no work—and that meant that he had money, which was the most important point.

She became quite contented—it was not very difficult—with the bashful respect with which Vassilii regarded her. For many days after they were together he was quite silent, as if he had been struck dumb by the miracle of having found her again; his bashfulness and his deep humility in the presence of this divine miracle of happiness kept him silent. He would have thought it incredibly arrogant to tell this wondrously beautiful and attractive Madonna, his affianced love, the maiden Sossia, of all the petty experiences and sufferings which he had endured for her sake. She was there with him; he looked at her and he asked himself how he had come to deserve such happiness.

As he did not talk about himself, she asked no questions. She soon realised, quite instinctively, his mental make-up, and so she changed from a prostitute into a lovely, virtuous and beautiful woman, who had passed the even-

ings of her life adorning herself for her far-away, unforgettable lover, and yearning for him; and who, now that she had found him again, was struggling to keep down and conceal her desire for him.

She only went on the streets occasionally, to earn the barest necessaries, and even then only after taking the utmost precautions; she told Vassilii that she was still living with her relatives.

At last one evening he ventured to tell her that he wanted, that he was longing to . . . that in fact he would like to marry her. Then she bashfully and happily said "yes!" and—as if she could no longer restrain her feelings —suddenly flung her arms round him, and kissed him impetuously but naïvely: and after that he told her at last the whole miserable story of his life in Germany, concealing nothing. He told her everything, from that night when, after leaving her, he had found Sofia Karlovna Semiovskaia dying by the crucifix; he told her the "great secret" which Sofia had whispered to him, and of which Sofia's son was still ignorant; he told her everything, of all the days and the nights of the war and the terrible months in Berlin; of the night when he had seen her and of all that took place later on that night . . .

". . . but they've not caught me . . ." he ended; and he thought to himself, how lovely! She listens to what I'm telling her, and she loves me! . . . "and now, Sossia, let's go back to our village; there we'll be all right and we'll have a little land, and children, Sossia!"

She had not said a word all the time, but now she could no longer control herself, and, quite pale with rage, she snatched her hand away.

"So you've no money at all?" she screamed.

She did not heed the solemn stillness of the evening which hung over the trees. They were walking through a little park filled with tall, dark trees, flecked with silver by the moon; and here and there, appearing for an instant and vanishing again, were the rustling shadows of people walking arm-in-arm and talking in low whispers to each other.

"So you've no money at all, you impostor!"

Her voice was loud, shrill and excited. He would never have believed that her voice could be like that.

He thought to himself: perhaps I really shouldn't have told her so much—and he grew quite sad and helpless. He tried to say something, such as "Dear!" or "My love!" but she told him to shut up. By degrees she got calmer again.

". . . keep quiet, you fool!" she said to him gently; "I must think things out!"

And she went on thinking.

Soon afterwards they parted; she told him that his confession had surprised her very much, and that now he must leave her alone; they could meet the next day at such and such a place. She felt sorry for him.

"I'll disappear as suddenly as he found me," she told herself. "He'll go on grieving about me and praying for me, and so perhaps many of my sins will be forgiven me in heaven; he is a good man, and I don't want him to know that I am a bad woman. He'll have to look after himself—he'll go the same way in life as I shall go, but our paths will diverge. What's the use of my being with him and his being with me? He could only be of any use if he had money; and I couldn't be of any use to him whether he had money or not . . ."

Next evening he waited for her in vain; his heart was sad, for he really could not understand why she should have given him up. He stood there waiting and waiting; many little, cold minutes turned into quarters of an hour and into hours. He walked up and down, and he got cold; night came, and he was still standing about, and when morning came there he was still in the same place.

Every evening after that he walked about through the streets, searching here and there and everywhere; and at last, several weeks later, he met her; she was coming towards him along a dark street, in the company of a drunken sailor, whose cap was on the back of his head and whose arm was round her waist. Vassilii saw her coming and he came to a halt. Just at that moment she saw him, and a good impulse ran through her, and she drove the sailor away.

"What is the matter, darling?" he asked in a sad, husky voice, throwing himself at her feet and staying there.

"He just grabbed hold of me!" Sossia said, as if excusing herself. She saw his good, kind face, and she felt weak and as if she were going to cry; she was drunk.

Then she turned round and vanished.

Vassilii did not go after her; he still seemed to feel her breath on his face, and it smelt of drink; he went slowly home.

There were several encounters of this kind, and each time Sossia was moved by a good impulse to cast off for Vassilii's sake the man with whom she happened to be, and then to run away. But Vassilii became like the Wandering Jew; he walked about from morning to night, hardly sleeping or eating; he often met her and looked at her, and though over and over again he tried

to understand, yet he never could understand, for everything was so perplexing, and Sossia . . . how he loved her—more and more each time he saw her!—and his blood rushed to his heart.

Her takings suffered from these silent reminders, and the oftener she met him the more his silent apparition seemed to her to be the judgment of God; his face pursued her even in her dreams; his eyes looked reproachfully at her from the corners of the taverns, and at every dark street-corner round which she was taking a man, there was Vassilii.

That went on for a long time, until one night she began to feel that she was making herself ridiculous, and she rose in revolt against the ghost. She was drunk and noisy, and as she was passing a police station with one of her customers, she saw Vassilii standing there, and she went in and gave his address to the police. She was absolutely drunk, and as soon as she had done it she began to feel the most terrible remorse. In the night she suddenly tore herself away from her wooer, jumped up and put on her clothes, and then ran wildly through the streets, now grey with the light of morning. She ran faster and faster, to Vassilii, to warn him—but then it was already too late; she got there just in time to see them fetching him out. He was walking along, handcuffed between two policemen; he looked at her, and his eyes were sad, because he loved her.

They took him away, leaving her standing there.

She crept slowly down to the harbour, but the water was too grey and rough, and there was oil gleaming on the surface in loathsome rainbows. She went back to her room; the man was still lying in her bed, with his mouth

open; he was dreaming, and he was breathing heavily. She put her hands up to her face and cried softly, so that she would not wake him.

And that was how Vassilii Lidin was captured by the police; there was no telling whether he knew that it was Sossia who had betrayed him, but during the time he was in prison he thought only of her—of her hair, and her two voices, the gentle and the shrill one, and her wide mouth and that peculiar, incomprehensible mystery that surrounded her.

"Is it as bad as that with you?" the officer asked.

Vassilii got up from his squatting position, banging against the shelf which was fastened high up on the wall, and followed him.

Fritz waited. There were still a number of formalities to be put through, and the cell in which Vassilii was imprisoned was some distance off, so a quarter of an hour had passed since he had first touched the iron bars which separated the long corridor from the prison section of the building.

He waited. The minutes grew longer and longer, they spread themselves out and seemed to smile down at him from the large clock hanging there. The sweat broke out on his forehead as he waited; he was trying to collect his thoughts, but he could not do it—they kept on becoming confused. For a moment he thought also of Irma; she had been so curious to know the great secret; should he telephone to her when he had discovered it, and tell her what it was? But perhaps he would not be

able to telephone to her? For it might be—there was no doubt it might be—a secret which would strike him like a thunderbolt, and he would die, or his left side would be paralysed; that sort of thing can happen!

"My God!" he thought, "one doesn't live from hour to hour for thousands of hours and days and nights, for years on end, years of terrible suffering, just for the sake of a secret, and then find in the end that the secret is a perfectly simple thing!"

He was standing here waiting for them to fetch the imprisoned man Vassilii Lidin. Vassilii *must* come; he could not run away, and he would not suddenly fall dead. To Fritz it would not mean any more effort to speak to Lidin; no more hunting for him, no more striving was necessary; in a moment footsteps would come nearer and then he, Vassilii, would be there. He would open his mouth and he would say:

"So and so."

". . . soon . . . soon . . . in a moment . . . he must be here . . ." Fritz thought. Then he heard him coming! Footsteps were coming closer—growing louder—in a moment—he would be here—in a moment now—the same walk as he used to have, Fritz thought . . .

. . . and at that instant he suddenly turned pale, and he lived his life through once again—he sobbed loudly, so that one of the officials looked up with astonishment and disapproval on his face; then Fritz rushed away from where he was standing, saw the corridor, and ran, rushed through the Criminal Court building, rushed and ran till his lungs gave out, and he fell. Then he jumped up again and ran on, with his tongue sticking to his teeth; his head felt as if it was full of coins which were

dancing up and down. He wanted to stop, but he could not stop; he ran on with his arms hanging down like a madman—he ran on, gasping, stumbling; he could never stop . . .

Then he reached a park with trees, where it was quite still, and the sun was shining.

He stopped running.

He saw a seat, on which an old woman was sitting reading; and by her side there was a little girl, intent on the sand with which she was playing.

Fritz sat down on the seat; the old woman took a quick glance at him and then went on reading. He fell asleep.

When he awoke he got up and asked his way to a post-office. There he handed in a reply-paid telegram, the text of which ran:

Can I come back and stay with you?

He gave only his Christian name, Fritz, as the sender of the telegram, and the reply was to be sent care of the post-office.

He handed it in; it was addressed to Friedel.

He saw a railway guide hanging in the post-office; there were still two more trains to Berlin that day.

"How long will it be before the answer can come?" he asked. The clerk told him he should ask at the Night Telegraph Office at about eight o'clock, and Fritz thanked him.

He walked slowly away through the streets; the afternoon was quite warm. Sparrows were flying about, and young girls in bright dresses were pushing white perambulators along. The trams were ringing their

bells, a boy jumped on to one; an old gentleman took off his fur cap and wiped his forehead, a chauffeur put on his brakes and cursed.

"I don't ever want to know it . . . !" Fritz told himself ". . . Never! Never! Never! I can't go on waiting and suffering any more. I don't *want* to know it. I shall just sink into the grey mass of men and live like everyone else. My life has been a dream; now at last I am awake; what a terrible dream it was!"

It was early spring, with its bright warm air, mild and pure; the flowers were coming to life, and the horses' eyes gleamed.

He wandered about, happy and at ease. He was a new man, filled with confidence and trust in God's mercy.

Towards eight in the evening he went to the telegraph office, and found a telegram in his name. He tore it open, and it was signed "Friedel."

And it read:

I have always been waiting for you.

"It's exactly twelve words with the address," he thought; "that's what *I* paid for!" and the thought passed across his mind: "How nice it would have been if she had added a thirteenth word herself!"

But then he looked at the twelve words, and through the rough paper he saw the girl's fat, good, child-like face. What nice words she had written: "I have always been waiting for you!"

Tears came into his eyes, and he went out.

His train left at eleven o'clock, so he had nearly three hours still. He felt hungry, and he walked slowly along through the dark streets in the direction of St. Pauli,

where there were a good many cheap restaurants.

In the Reeperbahn he went into a café to get something to eat; there he noticed a prostitute sitting at a table in a corner. Her head had sunk down on to the marble top, her left arm was hanging down, and she was sobbing softly, but her heaving shoulders showed how terribly she was suffering. A man was sitting quite helpless by her side; finally he called the waiter, paid the bill, got up with a bad-tempered shrug of his shoulders and went out. The couples and the single women at the other tables now lost all interest in the affair, and turned to what they themselves had in hand. The girl was quiet for a moment; she seemed to recover control, and she raised her head; and then Fritz saw that she was Sossia. Sossia! How long was it since . . .? He had recognised her at once. Sossia . . .

She glanced up and looked at him, and then her head sank again. He went over and sat down by her, without saying a word.

A pause.

There was music in the café, and scraps of many conversations, hurrying waiters, and hot air . . .

She looked up. Her eyes were tired, and there was no light or expression in them. She did not recognise him at first. He held her hand and said something in Russian to her, something good and fatherly: "My poor child, what's the trouble?"—or: "Well, well, it will come all right. What's wrong?"

The kindness in his voice, quite calm and reassuring, moved her deeply. He stroked her hair gently. He was not in the least surprised that he had come across her. All at once she was there, and he felt sorry for her;

he did not want to know anything more—whatever there might be was a long way in the past . . .

When she felt the gentleness of his hand on her head she began to cry again, but more softly and peacefully.

". . . Vassilii!" she sobbed.

". . . I know, Sossia; I was there to-day, I wanted to see him; he is in prison . . ."

"I!" she suddenly screamed, beating her breast; the couples looked up in astonishment and a waiter carrying two coffees stopped:

"I betrayed him!"

Her voice seemed to collapse and get absolutely toneless, and then it broke off.

And then he, too, was seized with dread, though he did not know exactly why. But he felt instinctively that once more the terrible dark fate of the whole human race had gripped him . . .

"I must go," he said, and tried to get up; but it was too late. She would not let him go, she held him fast and her hot voice whispered something in his ear . . . Her breath drenching him with the smell of liquor and tears and perfume, and it seemed to stupefy him—for a moment he tried to get away, but she held on to him, and then he gave way and listened to what she wanted to tell him. He grew quite weak and passive, and everything seemed to vanish—the café, the noise, the table, the world—submerged in Sossia's eager, hoarse whisper ". . . and the secret . . ." she whispered in his ear—

"*You are the son of the squire, of the man you killed . . .*"

He went to the station and travelled back to Berlin. Friedel was waiting for him at the Lehrter Station; it

was early in the morning, and rather cool. In the evening she wanted to be affectionate, but he sent her out to earn something first . . . He himself paid Adolf a visit, and they arranged to go out during the night.

In the Kantstrasse they agreed on their plan; they asked a young man in a fur coat for a match, and when he put his hand in his pocket, Adolf struck him on the temple with a piece of iron.

The young man fell, with a faint cry:

"My God!"

"Keep quiet!" Fritz whispered to him, while Adolf was already getting clear with his money.

Adolf stopped running some distance off; Fritz was not following. What was wrong? The street was empty, and Adolf felt agitated, and his heart was beating violently. He decided to go back, slowly, step by step.

Fritz was still standing at the same spot. The young man in the fur coat was lying there doubled up as if he were dead, a dark, still bundle on the edge of the pavement, near a lamp. The street was quite quiet and dark.

"What's the matter? Why don't you come away?" Adolf whispered to Fritz.

Fritz raised his hand, and Adolf saw that he was holding the weapon with which he himself—Adolf—had struck down the man in the fur coat. Fritz said:

"You look after yourself, Adolf! I am staying here. And besides, it was I that did it, you understand?"

A black cloud seemed to come in front of Adolf's eyes. He tugged at Fritz's shoulder:

"Man, you're crazy, come away . . ."

He tried to pull him away, but Fritz shook himself free.

". . . but why, then?" Adolf asked once more, altogether at a loss what to do.

"I'll tell you, Adolf: I'm staying, because I can't go on living any longer—and to atone for everything I've done . . ."

Adolf became curious.

"What is it you have done?" he whispered.

Fritz did not answer his question; he only said:

"Only criminals who are punished can ever free themselves from their conscience. I want to be punished . . ."

Adolf cried out:

"I, too, am always worrying, Fritz, and yet you're a good man!"

"Only criminals are good men, Adolf!"

Two people's footsteps could be heard in the distance.

"Go! Go!"

Adolf started off, hesitated, stood still; then a whistle sounded, and he vanished.

Fritz waited till the police came up.

That is how everything goes to ruin—cities, streets, houses and men. It is only in my case, each man thinks, that things will be different. . . .

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